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GAMES MASTER

300

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1993 - 2016

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GAMES MASTER

Issue 300 / February 2016

"It's you lot that make GM such a blast to put together"

Blimey. 300 issues, eh? Them's big numbers, no fewer than the most any gaming mag in the UK has ever accrued. Well done us! And over the last three decades we've covered the growth of the best hobby in the world through its most momentous evolutions.

From bedroom programmers, through our first hops, skips, jumps, and 'wahoos' into the realm of 3D and beyond, we've collated some of the most important titles in gaming history as part of a massive three part 300 special feature blow-out.

You also need to check out our super hard retro-themed quiz. Reckon you're a real RetroMaster? Then give it a go and let us know how you get on!

Before I let you get stuck in though: a quick thank you. Whether you've been reading since 1993 or this is your first issue, it's you lot that make GM such a blast to put together.

Here's to issue 400!

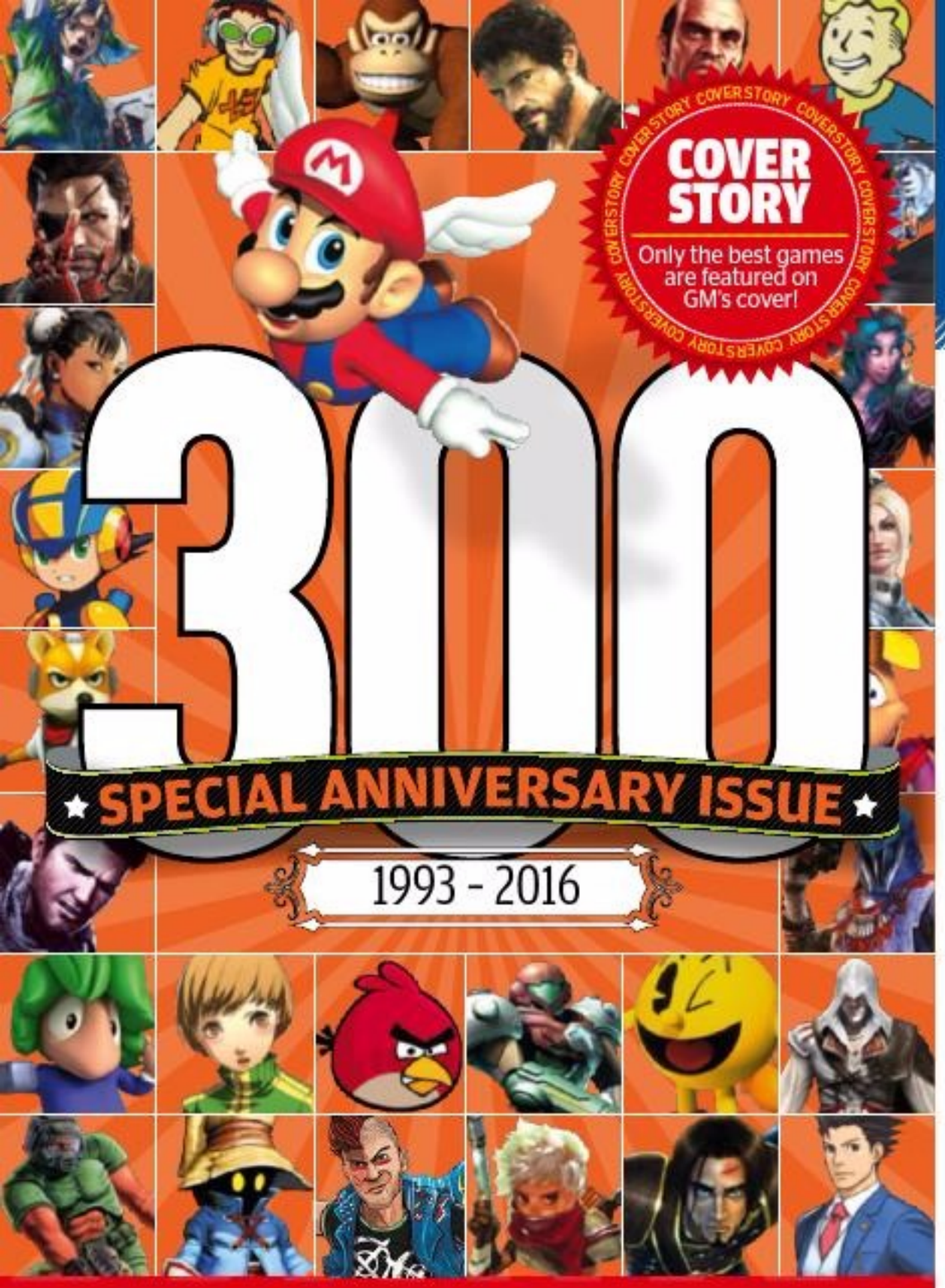
Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman – Editor

COMPETITION COMPETITION COMPETITION COMPETITION COMPETITION COMPETITION
WIN!
A lifetime subscription to GamesMaster! Enter via our quiz on p88
EDITOR'S CHOICE
MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE
10
Eiji Aonuma is a bone fide Nintendo legend, and we got to grill him on the future of Zelda.
300
SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
1993 - 2016
20
Three hundred issues. Three huge features. Three palettes of energy drinks consumed by Team GM.
WE LOVE OLD GAMES • WE LOVE OLD GAMES
Retro Master
Quiz!
88
Even I, with my mighty editor's brain, got stumped on a few of the questions in our concrete retro quiz!

GET MORE FROM YOUR GM!

Online at www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster

...or subscribe. See p92 for details.



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This franchise resurrection is one part concept album, one part rhythm action, and eight parts neon dream.

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Dogs may have taken over IndieMaster, but this month's CultureMaster belongs to cosplaying cats.

Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!

THE MOST DEDICATED TEAM IN THE BUSINESS

So dedicated that we locked ourself in a room (read: pub) with the heady task of collating this issue's three seismic features. Sore heads were felt by all, and only partly due to the copious furniture tossing.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman
Our editor this month demanded to be called 'Professor Matt' as he got to work determing the exact correct placements for every game on our mega-lists. He assures us Hatsune Miku at both top spots is "the mathematically logical result".

Sam Freeman
Art man Sam took on the role of Spartan king Leonidas as we slotted those three massive issue-busting features into his 'to do' tray. At least, we assume that's what was happening as he screamed "*This is art! Ahhhh!*" at his monitor.

Robin Valentine
Grammar wrangler Robin declared the new Star Wars to be "a bit bum". Also, that up is down, eggs is milk, and Saints Row should be in our top 100 lists. We cooked up the 300 special features as punishment for these transgressions.

The BIG GAME finder

Twilight Princess HD
Upfront – P10

EVE Valkyrie
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Uncharted 4: A Thief's End
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Fast Racing NEO
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Issue 300/ February 2016

GAMES MASTER

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CODE OF HONOR
Copyright, Charles Carter, Dorset
WHAT IS IT
It's a stealth game set in a WW2 prisoner of war camp. It stars Graham Holt, an RAF ace who's shot down over Germany and imprisoned. The challenge is to survive in the camp, sharpening your skills and gaining influence over the guards before making a bid for freedom.
HOW IT PLAYS
The main part of the game tests your ability to creep around the camp undetected, usually at night. How successful you are at this will affect Holt's speed, skill, and agility ratings. The daytime activity is equally important, as even though you're forced to do menial tasks which take the form of mini-games, you can use this time to form friendships and make allies.
POTENTIAL BEST BIT
Replaying the game, with a fully upgraded Holt and swinging round the camp and kicking ass like a 1940's ninja.
JUDGEMENT
Obviously influenced by Codemaster's Prisoner of War, but the RPG elements and open-ended nature add a whole new dimension. Hugely replayable.
QUOTE FOR THE BOX:
PRISON SHOULDN'T BE THIS FUN, SURELY!
PlayStation.2
CODE OF HONOR
SETH TEMPLETON
AGE 54
TRAITS
QUESTION
ARRE
LL
ACTION POINTS 4
VIEW CASE FILE
MAP

Here's Chaz's original 'prisoner of war' game idea, Code Of Honor, printed in GM159's 'We Love Games' section...

...and here's his latest project, a detective game called Welcome To Winkletown. Find out more at http://bit.ly/gmwinkle

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Unmissed connections

I have been playing on my Nintendo GameCube lately and it feels so refreshing using a console that does not want to connect to the internet. No firmware update, no games requiring a patch because there are so many bugs, no DLC, just decent games that I can enjoy from the off. I think the internet has taken the fun out of gaming.

Justin Dale, Facebook

We definitely see where you're coming from, Justin – it's frustrating loading up a new game you've been desperate to play, only to have to sit there staring at a progress bar. But without connected consoles, we wouldn't get free content updates, convenient digital downloads, online multiplayer, and loads of other awesome features. We reckon the few annoying moments are worth it!

Remembers only

After 300 issues of gaming goodness, we asked you for your favourite memories of GamesMaster:

I have a magic place in my life for this magazine as some of my comments have been printed in it. I can remember the first issue I bought (July 1999) with Soul Reaver on the front cover and the E3 games lineup inside. I knew from then on this mag was great.

Daniel Climo, Facebook

I can't remember my first issue, but I regret having to unsubscribe due to the fact that I was reading the magazines over revision for exams...

Kasim Arman Ul-Haq, @TheKasimkage

Over the past couple of years my friend and I were having a battle to see who

LETTER OF THE MONTH

From GamesMaster fan to games developer

Way back in issue 159, a young Charles Carter sent us his idea for a game. Now, over a decade later, he's a full-time professional games developer. For our 300th issue, we asked Chaz to share his story with us:

I started reading GamesMaster perhaps around 15 or 16 years ago. In those younger days I used to draw my own games magazines, inspired by GM, but I used to just re-word the reviews and scores!

I made my first game back then too – a "choose your own adventure" type game that I created in Microsoft Excel, using the row numbers as the choices. Saving it on floppy disk and making a "big box" for it from a cereal box made it feel like a real game.

I gradually discovered online Flash games, and in their earlier days, many of these were rudimentary and somewhat juvenile. This made me think that with dedication I would be able to use the program to develop something with a bit more quality. I started to learn the program and eventually began to work with others to make some... average games. It was only when I discovered it was possible to make a bit of money from my work that I really dedicated myself to it and I eventually made it my full-time job! (Currently six years self-employed).

My most recent game is called Welcome To Winkletown; you play the head detective of the titular town and must use eye-witness descriptions and visual clues to arrest the right criminal. I'm also working on my first ever full downloadable PC game that I intend to run through Steam Greenlight.

I am very glad to see the magazine continue its run as long as it has already and really do hope it keeps going far into the future.

Chaz Carter, email

We like to imagine it was that GM seal of approval back in 159 that gave you the confidence you needed... It's brilliant to hear you're finding success in your dream job, and we wish you the best of luck, Chaz! ■

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together? The best letter bags a free mystery game!*

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen format!

PIC OF THE MONTH

"I was there for one whole hour. Never once saw his face," says Damian Gale of this masked gamer, spotted at the Collectorabilia convention in Leeds.

Got your own gaming pic you want to share with the world? Send it in!

READER'S TOP 5 | GAMES TO PLAY RIGHT NOW

Forget our list – Nicholas has made his own. (Don't actually forget ours.)

1 Rainbow Six Siege
One of the most unique FPS games to come to market in a long time. And just plain fun!

2 Warhammer: End Times – Vermintide
Solid, polished co-op in a beautiful world with plenty of rats to kill.

3 Arma 3
Really can't go wrong here with the amount of DLC and mods the community creates for this game.

4 Don't Starve
What an absolutely amazing indie game. You can spend hours gathering, surviving, building, and fighting.

5 Railgun
My own game we're creating. Because my team is working very hard to create a fun indie shooter!

Nicholas Shain Ritter, Facebook

You can check out Nicholas' game here: http://bit.ly/gmrailgun. Disagree with his list? Let us know what yours would be! ■

"I HAVE A MAGIC PLACE IN MY LIFE FOR THIS MAGAZINE"

could get the most comments in your mag. I think I lead by one now. Also, I religiously abide by your ratings for games, spot on all the time.
Gary Gorman, Facebook

My first one was 2014's December issue. I loved it, and my bedroom wall loves all the posters too!
DilliriousGuy, @DilliriousGuy

I've been reading since around issue 20. Most memorable issue was definitely 57 – that one came with a VHS tape of upcoming games.
4JSteve, @4JSteve

Issue three was my first. I remember you attempting to cast a then-rumoured Street Fighter movie with Garth from Wayne's World playing Ken. If only...
Alan Provan, @BigRedAP

We loved reading all your mag nostalgia this month. Sorry to get mushy on you, but we really couldn't ask for better fans!

Staying the course

Over ten years ago, when I was in primary school I believe, there was an e-mail that I read in the October 2005 issue (GM 167, the one with Shadow The Hedgehog on the cover) from a guy complaining about the state of videogames back then, and your response was: "study Computer Science and pay extra attention to C++ programming if you don't like it".

It is because of this that I had no trouble choosing to study Computer Science, a fantastic course given that videogames are officially the biggest entertainment media in the world, and not to mention today's focus on computers and tech. This magazine is part of the reason why I never struggled to figure out what I wanted to do in the future. Thank you, GamesMaster.
Jeanette Nying, email

It's humbling to hear that GamesMaster magazine played a part in helping you choose your future career, Jeanette! Thank you for being such a loyal reader all these years. Maybe we'll even be reviewing a game you worked on one day in the future? ■

OFF THE CHART!

Your social chat baked into a rainbow pie

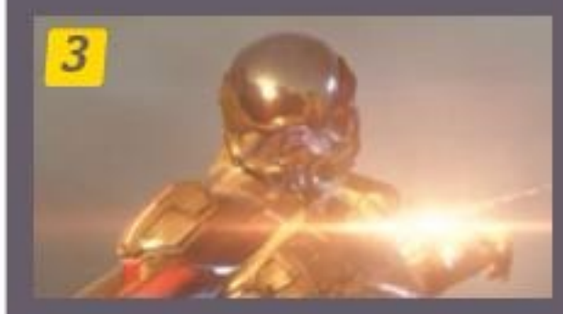
- **45%** What's the funniest game of all time?
- **26%** Multiplayer that keeps you coming back for more
- **15%** Gaming heroes of 2015
- **08%** Which supervillain needs their own game?
- **06%** Your favourite Starcraft characters

YOUR TOP 5 MOST WANTED

A certain long-awaited remake zips to the top of the charts, while an old charmer holds strong...

FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE
Format PS4 **ETA** 2017
No surprise that maybe the most exciting remake ever is number one – find out all the new details on p59.

UNCHARTED 4
Format PS4 **ETA** 26 April
Nathan stays at second for another month. His latest adventure is so close we can taste it! Mmm... archaeology.



MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA
Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** Winter
A whole new adventure in a whole new galaxy. We can't wait to see Bioware's classic series return.

MIRROR'S EDGE CATALYST
Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 26 May
A parkour open world that we can flip, sprint, and tumble around at will? We've got Faith this is going to be amazing.

DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED
Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 23 August
We all asked for this, and now it's just half a year away. Time to make wearing sunglasses inside cool again.

YOU LOVE GAMES

Cool stuff and videogame culture

This brilliant Iron Man sign was made in Fallout 4 by Alain Bearder, to mark the building where he keeps all his power armour.

Johnathan Tilbrook emailed us this amazing custom Mortal Kombat Khristmas card! (Well, it was timely when he sent it in...)

Polish blacksmith Alan Haart Padziński not only forged this incredible replica of Ciri's sword from The Witcher 3, but he's in an actual guild. You can find more of their work at: http://bit.ly/gmaudentia

Need some real life Skyrim loot in your life? Grab these awesome Dragon Priest masks from Etsy seller GEEKdesigners here: http://bit.ly/gmdmask

Redditor LuWuXp made this cute felt Yo-Kai Watch magnet for her fridge! You can see more of her work on her twitter @LuWuXP.

SOCIAL GROUSING

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels

Has anyone ever done the special stages in Micro Machines? Even on an emulator with save states it's hard.

Shae, @ShaePQ92

Please, please bring the TV show back. With today's consoles, it would totally work!

Casual Gamer, @Termi187nator

I want Kojima to make a successor to PT!

Zed_psx, @dreamcast82

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!

My fave gaming hero of 2015? Me, for playing so many games! And I have two kids...

Samuel L-Jackson Hamilton, Facebook

Donkey Kong launched Shigeru Miyamoto's career, introduced Mario, and saved Nintendo. Gaming as we know it just wouldn't exist without it.

Andrew McGrae, @TGNProfessor

Can you help me find the hidden Chaos Emeralds in Sonic 2?

Richard Harris, @cigarboyrick82

All of Superman's powers, no conscience... Kneel before Zod!

Adam Wiper, Facebook

Telltale's doing everything but TWD S3!

Lee Stepney, Facebook

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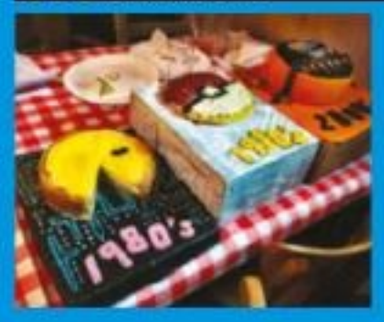
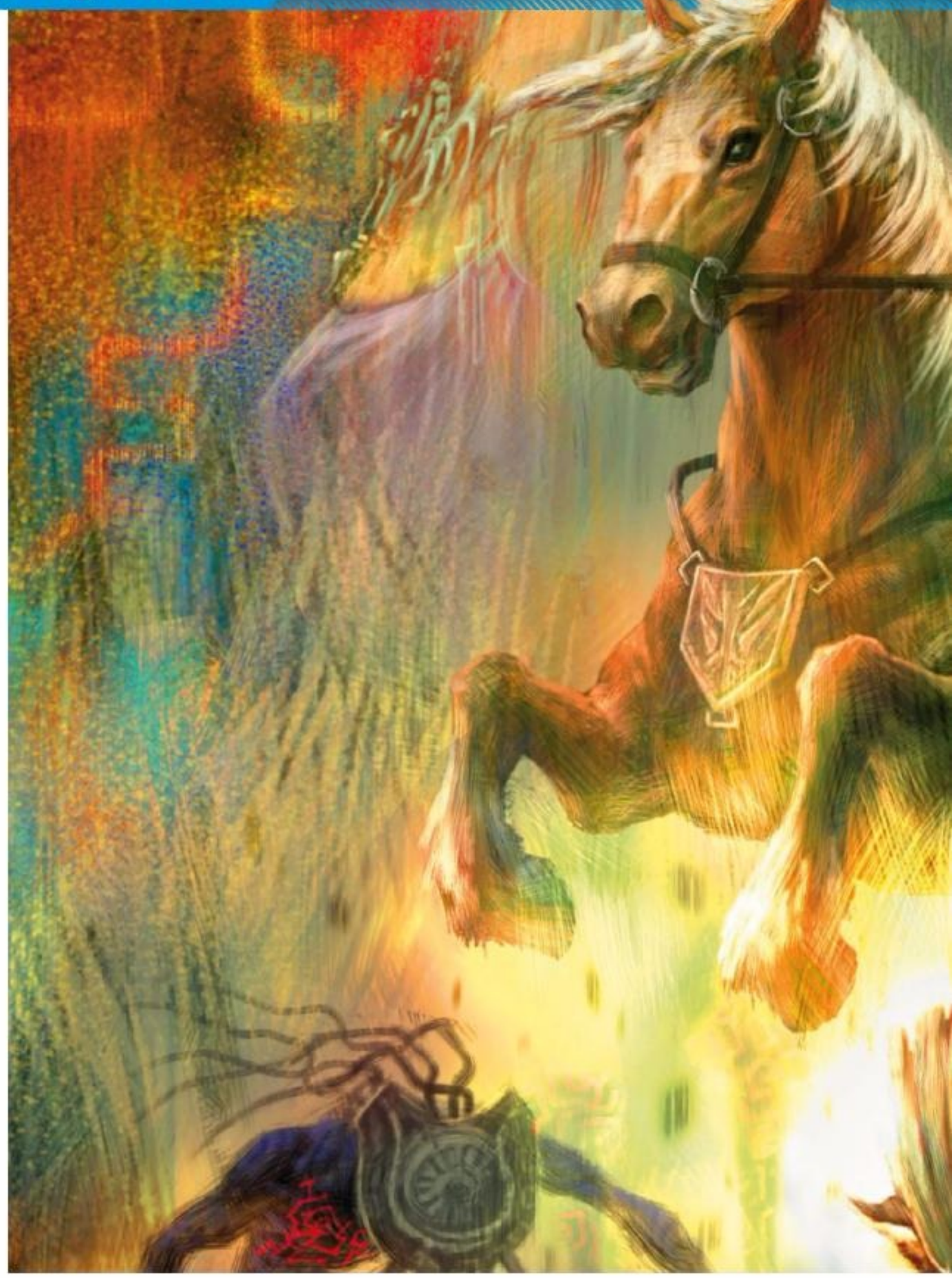
12 Bake on me



We head to Gamerbake, the event wherein gamers bake cakes. And eat 'em. Natch.

HERO OF TIME

We chat past, present, and future with Zelda's producer, **Eiji Aonuma**



Nintendo loves to prove Zelda's essential timelessness by remastering past classics, from Ocarina Of Time, via Majora's Mask, to Wind Waker, but just what is it about these fantasy quests, beginning back in 1986, that continue to chime with players across the world?

"I feel that it's particularly this universal thirst for adventure that boys – and I believe girls as well – have, that resonates across generations throughout the Zelda series," the man at the franchise's helm since 1998, Eiji Aonuma, tells us. "I think that what users are looking for is entertainment (and it was the theme of our development in Twilight Princess), whether they can sink into the game world, and enjoy a special experience that they couldn't in their everyday lives."

2006 GameCube and Wii classic Twilight Princess is the latest to receive Nintendo's HD treatment, in conjunction with skilled Australian porters Tantalus. Alongside the obvious boost in visual fidelity sit a litany of improvements that weren't possible to implement in the days before frequent patching. Link's horse Epona now handles better, and the elf boy himself has increased mobility while swimming. "Looking back now, getting the controls for both land and water just right has proven to be a big challenge throughout the series," says Aonuma as he reflects on previously adjusting the underwater navigation for Zora Link in last year's Majora's Mask 3DS remake.

Then there are the more subtle refinements. In the original, if your wallet was full and you opened a chest that contained Rupees, the Rupees would remain in the chest and its lid would close. The problem here being that in previous games players used open chests to know they'd visited a location, and this change meant they could no longer do that. Aonuma and his team considered this and reimplemented chests that remain open after you interact with them.

Voice cuts

Some aspects of Zelda are slightly more set. "We've had a lot of requests from fans to hear [Link's] voice, and while in some ways I do feel that it could be good to have a game where he speaks, part of me also feels that that air of proud independence he has because he doesn't speak is a precious part of the individuality of his character. I want to think long and hard about whether changing that would be for the better or not before I make any decision."

It's not unprecedented for fan demands to make a big impact, however. After all, one of the reasons we've already seen in-game footage of Wii U's next

14 Dead ed' redemption

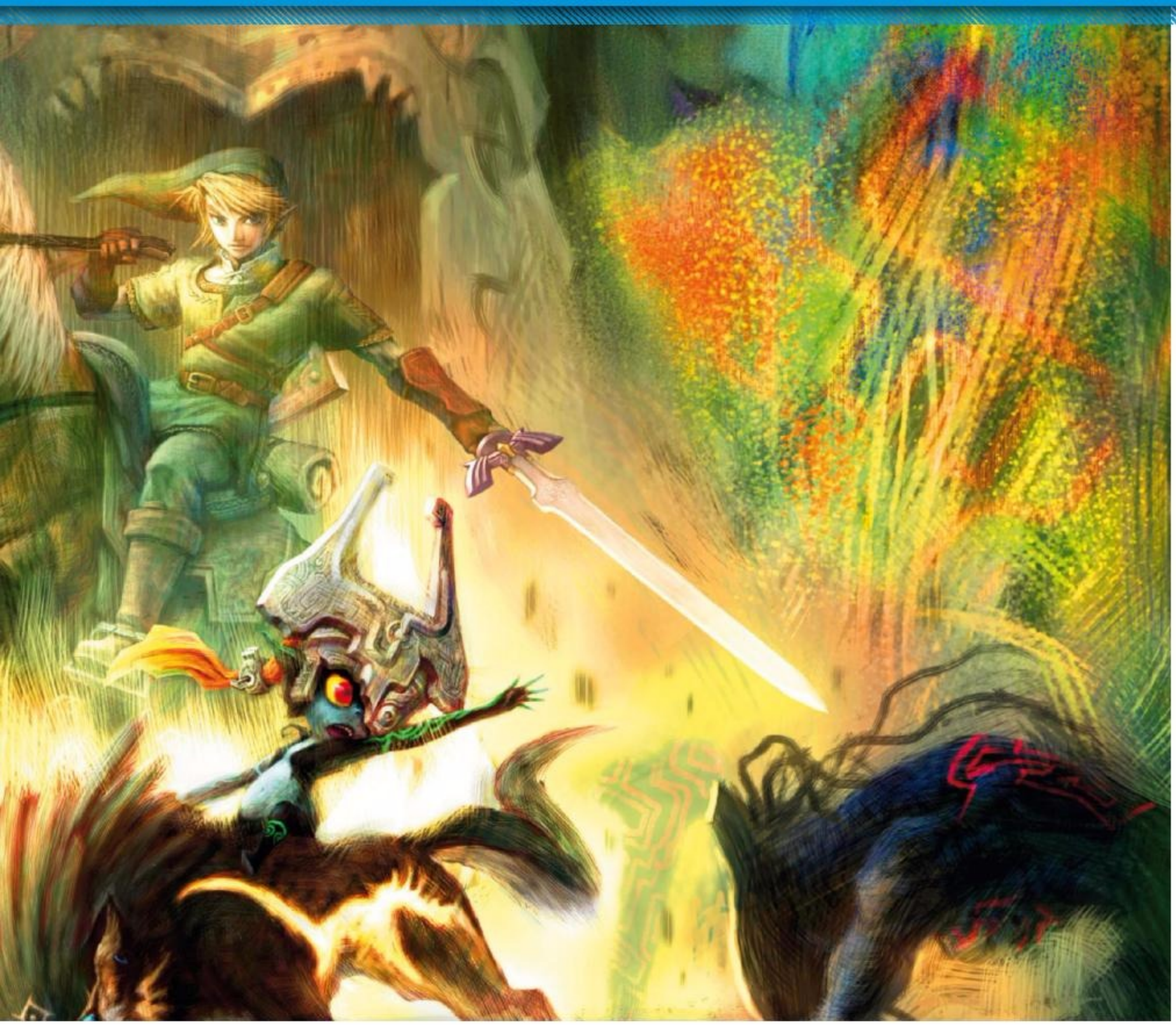
Celebrate our 300th with GM's ex-editors, as they gather around the fire and share tales of yore.

16 Splat's all?

Wii U's best new IP? Splatoon is fast becoming just that. Developer interview: engage!

17 Pac a punch

We meet the daddy of Pac-Man, Toru Iwatani, who shares some insight pellets on game design...



Zelda, which is so far off as to not even have a release date, is so Nintendo can react to feedback. "We're constantly thinking about how to make it unique compared to other games, both in general as well as to others in the Zelda series. Of course, the response of fans is most important and something we care very much about, which is why recently we have been showing early previews at events like E3. We're looking to see that there are no problems with the directions we're taking, and are reflecting the reactions we do get into subsequent development." The result is that Wii U Zelda is undergoing a much longer development period than most games (there's been only one mainline console series entry in ten years), but one that Aonuma hopes will ensure it meets the towering expectations of the series.

"PART OF ME FEELS THAT DEVELOPERS PUTTING THEIR IDEOLOGIES IN GAMES IS SCARY"

Meaning of life

There is danger, of course, in tuning in to outside frequencies, the overwhelming white noise of voices outside the development process who often don't know what they really want. After Ocarina Of Time, for instance, Wind Waker's dramatic cel-shaded aesthetic shocked fans and divided opinion. Fast forward ten years and Wind Waker HD is met with near unanimous praise, a game that feels like it peeled back layers of Earthen-toned visuals to reveal the game Zelda was all along – an escape into a world of childlike wonder.

Our everyday lives are beset by distractions, whether it's a 24-hour news cycle, relentless advertising campaigns, or millions shouting their piece from social media rooftops. Zelda has always rejected this. With its silent protagonist and unplaceable dreamlike location, it's refreshingly free of meaning. And that's just how Aonuma and co. want it. "I haven't and won't be trying to put any message or meaning into the games. (If someone else were to make a Zelda game though, of course it might be different.) Occasionally I receive messages from fans telling me how playing Zelda games has changed their lives. While of course this makes me incredibly happy to hear, I feel a great sense of responsibility as well, so part of me feels that developers putting their own ideologies in games is kind of scary." From remasters to fresh releases, Zelda remains in the safe hands of Aonuma. ■

GAMERBAKE HITS LONDON

To be this good takes baking...

While the focus at the start of any new year may be losing all the weight we tend to pile on over the Christmas festivities, back in mid-December, before a mince pie was even a twinkle in our eye, we were firmly focused on eating cake. Specifically gaming-themed cakes, baked for the third instalment of Gamerbake – the leading baking competition for gamers. The idea is simple: you bake a cake decorated to reflect a game of your choice, you bring it along to Gamerbake, and you let the masses – and some esteemed judges – drop it down their, ahem, cakeholes, before a winner is picked and proceeds donated to Special Effect. The latest event, which took place in London's sufficiently geeky Loading Bar, saw the likes of Videogamer's Yir Auld Da, IGN's Gav Murphy and Gamespot's Kate Gray take on the role of judging this sugary sensation, all while GamesMaster humbly attempted to slip slices of icing into our pockets for the train ride home...

1 WHERE MINECRAFT MEETS MARZIPAN

We can't be sure, but we're pretty sure we saw someone from Microsoft try to acquire Fitsy Fitscat's Minecraft-themed cake throughout the course of the evening – and we wouldn't blame them, either. Merry Christmasssssss (as titled) took some setting up upon arrival and came with the addition of some minty chocolate Minecraft cubes in a box not pictured here. We're not actually sure if the cake contained any marzipan whatsoever to be honest, but it made a good headline, okay?

2 THE CAKE OF YOUR DREAMS

As Nights Into Dreams-themed cake baker Leanne Bayley observed throughout the course of the evening, the hotter the lights in the Loading Bar got, the more the characters atop this ode to all things Sega began to slump – Sonic in particular looked like he was suffering after an especially heavy night. The creativity involved, however, won plaudits from all quarters, and it helped that the chequered insides (part Red Velvet cake, part coconut cake) proved to be a dream combination.

3 HERE'S A CAKE THAT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL OLD

Can you get away with pizza in a cake baking competition? Bakers Mo & Fats clearly thought so, and their attempt to pay homage to the evolution of gaming through three separate bakes brought together as one entry – with the 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s all represented - certainly turned heads when it came through Loading Bar's doors fairly late on in the competition.

4 A CAKE FOR THE MASSES

Some games are easier to model in cake form than others. We'd imagine that attempting to simulate Mass Effect's M35 Mako – the game's shooting, tooting mode of transport – crashing into the side of a rocky mountain isn't the easiest task to undertake, yet Maz Hemming still gave it a good go, and impressed those gathered in Loading Bar in the process. Most definitely not a cake for those who don't like tucking into icing sugar aplenty, mind.

5 WHEN ONE CAKE JUST ISN'T ENOUGH

All cakes are welcome at Gamerbake, whether they come in the form of an elaborate multi-layer setup or, in the case of Michael Straeubig's Pokey's Nightmare – an obvious tip of the hat to the ghosts from Pac-Man – just a few cupcakes, appropriately decorated. It also helps if they taste good, of course, and when the game they're referencing is one of the most iconic in history, you're bound to win favour with a room packed full of peckish gamers.

6 MARIO IS THE ICING ON THE CAKE. LITERALLY...

It would be very strange indeed if a game event of any kind didn't come with a reference or two to Mario. Adam Russell's Cool, Cool Mountain was about as close to a ride on the real Mario 64 stage as we can imagine a cake being, complete with snow-covered hills and the Italian plumber himself, stood proudly atop the slopes with a penguin in his hands. His frame looks a little buffer than we remember it, in truth. A New Year gym routine, perhaps?

7 HOW TO STEAL A CAKE COMPETITION

This nondescript Thief-themed carrot cake – or Garrett Cake, as it was creatively named – was perhaps most notable not for baker Andrew Smith's decision to pay respects to Eidos' celebrated stealth series, but rather because it was the only gluten-free entrant in the competition. In practice this meant it was thick enough to serve as loft insulation and compact enough to fill you up with just the smallest of slices. It also happened to be gosh-darned tasty. Even if, whichever way you slice it, it was just a carrot cake with a silly, game-centric name tacked on.

8 [INSERT OWN CAKE/ LIE REFERENCE]

Is it possible to win a cooking competition with a cake that never really existed? Ana Piferrerer's The Cake Is A Lie was actually two different gingerbread houses pieced together and made obvious reference to the popular Portal meme. Though not strictly a cake, Ana's bake came out on top with the judges and went on to win Gamerbake with all the plaudits. Phew! Now to start adhering to our strict post-Gamerbake exercise regime...

HEADS OF GREAT

Meet three of GamesMaster's greatest eds of times past, as they reveal some of their standout memories of the last 300 issues...

Robin Alway
- Staff Writer 1997-98
- Editor 2000-07
- Editor-in-Chief 2007-13

My first day on GM saw me sat down wide-eyed in front of a fabled, imported Japanese N64, still months from a UK release. Super Mario 64 was in the cartridge slot and things only took a double-jumping "Wahoo!" into gaming heaven from that moment on. Now, it wasn't how every taxi driver seemed to think when they asked me what I did for a living. I didn't quite "play games all day and get paid for it." But for a lifelong game and magazine fan there weren't many places better to be. And even the bad games – Frankenstein Through The Eyes Of The Monster on the Sega Saturn caused permanent damage – were fun to write about.

It was a privilege to have a ringside seat for the most exciting industry on the planet for well over a decade. I always tried to make sure the mag took as many fellow gamers as possible along for the ride with breathless enthusiasm, too many exclamation marks, and daft jokes all crammed onto pages that were designed to look like a teenager's bedroom. Things might look cooler around here now, but that same love of games is still as strong as ever in today's GM.

Golden era

When it comes to the games, there are enough to make my memory need buffering, and despite the best intentions of PR people who always made us sit through them, no recollections involve elaborate, over-long CGI intros. Any montage sequence of memories from my time on GM would instead kick off in the late '90s with the 32-bit console generation which saw games pop into 3D for the first time. What bliss to be alive, even in GM's skanky, crowded office, when the likes of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time, Shenmue, and Metal Gear Solid turned up.

The arrival of Xbox defined the next generation. We'd been lucky enough to follow it from when it was an actual giant chrome 'X', so taking delivery of the final console and being some of the first in the country to experience that moment at the start of Halo's second level when you drop down onto the vast, ringworld surface left no jaw undropped. Nothing put quite such a smile on my face as getting to hit tennis balls around on the Wii the day before the console was unveiled at E3, and I interviewed Shigsy about it. There was also the time when the world exclusive review copy of a promising game called GTA III arrived. It came with a cheat to turn on all the weapons, and I still remember checking on our reviewer the next day to find he'd barely touched the missions because he was having so much fun trying to take out the entire US army. Often it wasn't my eyes seeing things early but one of Team GM who were gabbling down the phone excitedly about the next massive entry in the Grand Theft Auto, Batman Arkham, Call Of Duty, or Assassin's Creed franchises.

As awesome as the games and the consoles were, working with some brilliant people, some of whom became my best friends, helped pull us over the deadlines or being called into the boss's office to explain what our cover game, Manhunt, was all about. Ultimately, it was always GM's readers that gave the energy boost we needed to take a few more grabs for the 800th screenshot of the issue, or make a caption funnier, or stop playing Virtua Tennis on the Dreamcast and actually do some work. ■

Matthew Pellett

- Games Editor 2011-12
- Deputy Editor 2012-13
- Editor 2013-14

As a childhood fan of GamesMaster, it was always special to work for the magazine. I spent over four years doing so from afar, but joining the team full-time in 2011 was a dream come true. Looking back, a few issue highlights jump out: getting to review Skyward Sword as my first task after four and a half years working on an Xbox magazine full-time; piecing together the 250 greatest moments in gaming history for the 250th issue; writing a Fighting Fantasy-style Hitman: Absolution King Of Chinatown Choose-Your-Own-Path feature (which Fighting Fantasy legend Ian Livingstone then complimented); shaping the redesign in my final month... But more than anything it was the readers who made my spell so special.

Good ship GM

I've never known a crowd as passionate as the GM readership. Whether it was playing with or against the fans on Xbox Live or PSN, or just talking with them on social media and via letters, it was always the thing I loved most. It's the readership who drove GM onwards and helped it evolve. In the end, I realised that I was just as influential on the magazine back when I was a little kid writing in letters and cheats as I was when I worked under the GamesMaster banner, and as the mag sails through its incredible 300 milestone I'm really excited to see where the readers want to steer the mag in the future. ■

Joel Gregory

- Editor 2013-15

It's genuinely hard to pick a favourite, as my 18 months at the helm of GM were packed with memorable moments. I got to report from E3 and Gamescom twice apiece, as well as travel the globe to see so many games. There was my brutal induction into the world of Nidhogg during my second week, Matt SG taking great pleasure in my pixelated pain, along with plenty of in-office Mario Kart and Super Smash Bros. And there was the Great Christmas Jumper Pub Trip, of which almost no memory has been retained, particularly by then-departing GM art editor Phil and the dinner he really should have eaten beforehand.

Pun times

There's also a huge amount that I'm proud of, including launching our now-annual 51 Best Games and Awards issues. But the making of our first 100 Greatest Games issue, put together in the pre-Christmas mania of December 2014, stands out. That time of the year is always stressful: the office closes down over the holiday period, so the team has to make two magazines in the space normally reserved for one. As such, it seemed logical to try to produce the biggest feature in GM history during that time, sending myself and everyone else more than a little bit mad. So. Many. Printouts. If you think some of the puns in the mag are bad, you should have seen the cutting room floor for that issue. ■

GM MOST WANTED

What's most tickling the team's fancy this month

MATT'S PICK

Doom

I've got a soft, squishy spot for '90s era shooters. Circle strafing and speedy movement are tenets of the genre that were seemingly abandoned long, long ago. Harking back via Shadow Warrior and its ilk fills a hole, but Doom promises to be the contemporary genre update I've longed for. Head on over and read our preview on p56 and I reckon you'll feel the exact same way.

PS4, XO, PC – Summer

ROBIN'S PICK

Divinity: Original Sin 2

The first iteration was one of my favourite RPGs in years, and I can't wait to see its innovation expanded on in this Kickstarted sequel. All I need to do now is round up a group of trustworthy co-op partners to join me on my adventure... Get your wizard hats and chainmail on, Team GM!

PC – December

SAM'S PICK

Mirror's Edge Catalyst

Jumping, sliding, and skidding around photorealistic, futuristic environments whilst hunting down the scum of the City of Glass sounds like a winning combo to me! Particularly if recent gameplay footage is to be believed. If the storyline improves over the original then we could be running right into a winner!

PS4, XO, PC – 24 May 2016

Splatoon started life as a prototype about boxy blocks of tofu spitting ink from their noses.

Nintendo's added dozens of gear items to the game since launch, so players can engage in some creative couture.

It's also rolled out regular balance tweaks to its paint-based turf wars.

MAKING A SPLASH

Splatoon's devs talk accessibility, anxiety, and sequels

With the launch of yet another pack of gear and levels, Nintendo has rounded off a sterling season of post-release support for its crazy calico shooter, augmenting an initially rather slight base game with a generous suite of paint-based firearms, variegated stages, and groovy gear.

So when we caught up with the team behind this colourful reinvention of the multiplayer shooter, we began by asking whether they were inspired by, or reacting against, the current crop of online shooters.

"We're gamers at heart and we play a lot of different kinds of games, including online shooters," explains Splatoon producer Hisashi Nogami. "Sometimes we take inspiration from the games we play and other times we spot problems."

Those problems come down, in many cases, to accessibility, and that's something the team at Nintendo set out to resolve. "The development staff felt we wanted to show more players, especially those who don't play existing multiplayer shooters, just how much fun this kind of gameplay could be," according to Splatoon director Yusuke Amano.

Second coat

And although Splatoon certainly seems like a thoroughly assured effort, Nogami reveals that there was a certain amount of pre-release jitters within the team. "We've dealt with online multiplayer in a number of titles up until now, but this was the first time we'd taken up the challenge of releasing a package game where multiplayer was the main mode," he explains.

"We were not 100 percent sure about how a few sections would be received, and so we're really happy to see them being well received not only by experienced online gamers, but by a really broad range of players including children and female players too; it's a real confidence boost," says Nogami. "If we have the chance in future, I'd like to build on online gameplay even more."

So that's Splatoon 2 confirmed, then? "We want to raise this new IP with care," Nogami hints, "so maybe we'll get a chance to make it happen if players support us." We'll keep our fingers and tentacles crossed. ■

The Burning Question

Which videogame would you love to see behind the scenes of?

Assassin's Creed
I'd love to find out how they make such vast and beautiful places.
Nolan, @DiliriousGuy

Final Fantasy VII Remake
Just to see how much effort they put into Cloud's dress...
Jamie Sergison, Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.

"WE WANTED TO SHOW MORE PLAYERS JUST HOW MUCH FUN THIS KIND OF GAMEPLAY COULD BE"

Pac-Man's original game file size was a piddling 24kb – not a patch on our current-gen games' mammoth files!

PAC IN ACTION

Toru Iwatani, creator of Pac-Man, talks designing games for everyone

At a recent Bandai Namco press event, the father of one of the most iconic videogames of all time humbly asked his audience: "Does everyone know Pac-Man?" After the disbelieving giggles subsided, Toru Iwatani gave a mini-masterclass on videogame design using his dot-munching, ghost-dodging classic as an example.

Iwatani described Pac-Man as his attempt "to make the arcade a brighter place."

"Fun first is one mantra," he said, "and it's also very important that the game is simple, so that the young, the old, people all around the world can play this game." For Iwatani, making games "involves understanding people's emotions. The structure of the game should be such that before you hit a wall, there should be some level of being kind to the player, leading them forward." We wonder how he gets on with Dark Souls.

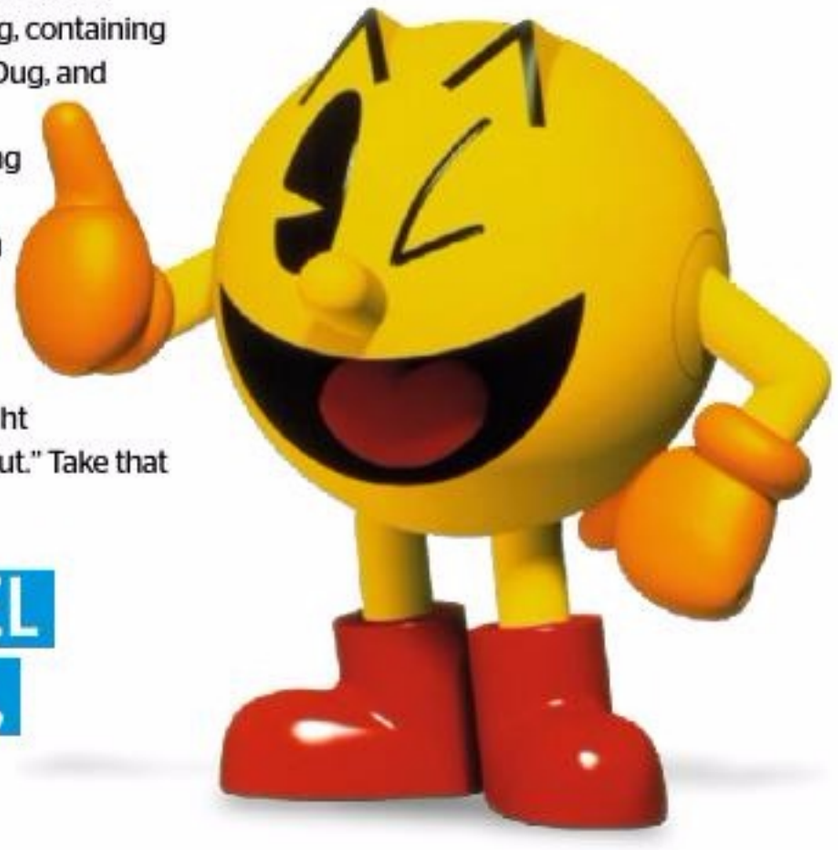
Cherry bombshell

And get this: he's currently developing "games that everyone can play, including people who can't necessarily see".

"What are games going to be like when there aren't even monitors?", he mused. "You want to internalise the game inside you and understand what's going on in the game without even seeing it. That's what I'm working on now."

If that wasn't exciting enough, he announced that digital-only title Arcade Game Series comes to PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC this spring, containing Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, Dig Dug, and Galaga. Iwatani ended with some sage advice confirming his status as the coolest videogame dad ever: "If you don't enjoy Pac-Man, you don't have to call me", he assured everyone. "Look inside yourself, and you might have some things to work out." Take that Pac-Man naysayers! ■

"THERE SHOULD BE SOME LEVEL OF BEING KIND TO THE PLAYER, OF LEADING THEM FORWARD"



HEY! LISTEN!

A blind gamer has successfully completed The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time, making use of carefully placed stereo speakers and an emulator's quicksave function to conquer the N64 classic. Terry Garrett began streaming his adventures in Hyrule in 2011 and finally finished off Ganon at the beginning of 2016, when he uploaded the final video.

TURTLE POWER

Although Platinum Games' adaptation of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is yet to be announced, artwork from the rumoured project has appeared online. It looks like the inspiration comes from the comics, not the cartoons – and you can see Splinter and Shredder in the background!

STALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

The next Assassin's Creed will be set in Ancient Egypt and is scheduled for a 2017 release, it's rumoured. Following negative fan reaction to Unity's glitchy launch, Ubisoft may be rethinking its annualised release schedule. Let's hope for some polished Pyramid-clambering next year.

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

Bandai Namco has confirmed Tales Of Berseria is heading West. The publisher boasts that the latest instalment in the series is the first to feature a woman as its singular main character... which is undermined just a smidge by the game's apparent abundance of underboob.

Topping the leaderboard this issue

YOU WIN

YOU LOSE

No, we don't want to continue thanks

PLATINUM POSTPONED

Xbox One exclusive Scalebound is delayed. Developer Platinum Games says its reptilian action RPG is now due sometime in 2017. The dev attributes the delay to the sheer ambition of the project, one of the largest it's ever worked on, with role playing mechanics and four-player co-op nestled alongside Platinum's knack for brawling.

VIRTUAL PUNCTUALITY

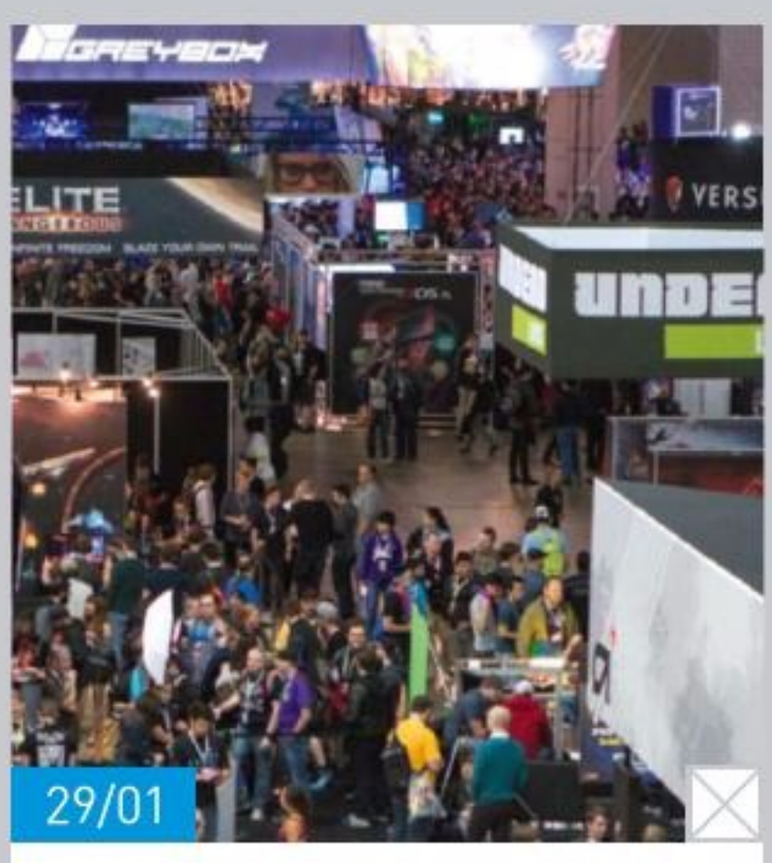
The promised VR revolution is running late, with Oculus and HTC announcing delays to their forthcoming VR gizmos. HTC has postponed the launch of its Vive headset to April 2016 in order to add a front-facing camera. While the Oculus Rift is on track for early 2016 release, its Touch controller won't be ready until the second half of the year.

STOCKING FILLER

A nine-year-old boy was left with some searching questions for Santa this past Christmas day, when he unwrapped a brand new PlayStation 4 only to find a profanely-doodled piece of wood inside. The lump of timber had been shaped to resemble Sony's angular hardware and carried the message "From c**k and balls with love" alongside a helpful illustration. Retail employee prank or new PS4 SKU? You decide.

XMAS QUARREL

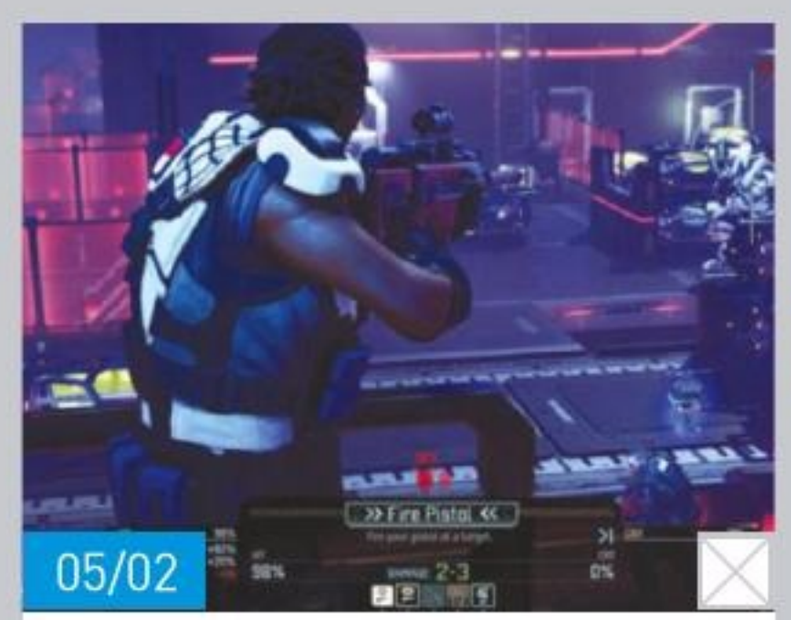
A serious security snafu exposed the "sensitive personal information" of roughly 34,000 Steam account holders to random other users in a Christmas Day breakdown of Valve's security measures. The mixup basically served billing addresses, email addresses, and partial credit card numbers to the wrong users for a half hour period. Valve has apologised and promised to contact affected users individually.



29/01

DUE SOUTH

Keep your ears open for some cheeky indie announcements out of PAX South today.



05/02

WELCOME TO EARTH

Take back your planet or die trying (repeatedly) in XCOM 2, on sale now.

08/02

MONKEY BUSINESS

Get ready to go bananas for Chinese New Year – 2016 is the Year Of The Monkey.

14/02

HEART'S TONE

It's Valentine's Day! What do you mean you forgot? You remembered to get a card, right?!

THE GM TO DO LIST

Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...

09/02

BATTER UP

Get a flippin' move on! It's time to get your batter in the pan for Pancake Day.

16/02

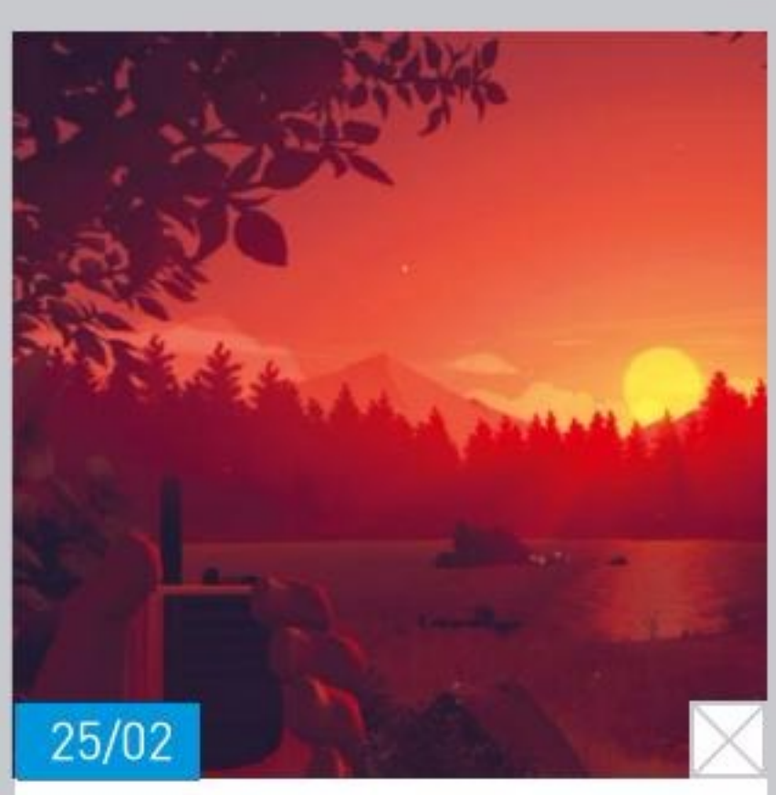
FIGHT NIGHT

Get your gi on – Street Fighter V shoryukens its way onto shelves today.

23/02

PRIMAL RAGE

It's release day for Ubisoft's mammoth new open-world game, Far Cry Primal.



25/02

WATCH OUT

Let us guide you through the wilderness of gaming with GM301, on sale now!

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...

01

The Division
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 8 March

02

Quantum Break
Format XO
ETA 5 April

03

Dark Souls III
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 12 April

04

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End
Format PS4
ETA 26 April

05

Mirror's Edge Catalyst
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 26 May

06

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 23 August

Feature

On The Cover!

SPECIAL ANNIV

**GAMESMASTER IS A SPAN
TO CELEBRATE, WE'VE COLLA
FEATURE RAMMED FULL OF**

VERSARY ISSUE ★

KING 300 ISSUES YOUNG! TED A MAG-BULGING SUPER AMAZING GAMES. DIG IN!

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THE NEXT 100 YEARS ACCORDING TO VIDEOGAMES
ZOMBIES! GRAFFITI SKATERS! BUG INVASIONS! IF GAMES TELL IT TRUE WE'RE IN FOR A WILD RIDE...

100 GAMES TO SHOOK

Join us as we run down our epic collection of the most

Videogames have come a long way over the years, and with 300 issues under our belts, GM's been there longer than pretty much anyone else to chart their highs and lows. We've also compiled an awful lot of lists over the years, detailing these titles definitively. This is different though. This is not a list of the best games, nor of the games you should crack out and give a go right now (though you'd earn yourself a gaming education by doing so). No. These the most important, most *influential* games of all time. Oh, and they have to meet our totally scientific requirement of having been released *before December 2010*. Disagree with our picks? Head to p98 and let us know!

100
E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
Format Atari 2600
Pub Atari **Dev** Atari
Year 1982

You can't deny its cultural significance – a game so bad it crashed the '80s video game industry and had to be buried en masse in the desert.

99
DEMON'S SOULS
Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev From Software
Year 2009

Effectively a Dark Souls prototype that established the series' unique tone and approach – and Miyazaki's place in the industry.

98
CHRONO TRIGGER
Format SNES **Pub** Square
Dev Square **Year** 1995

An epic JRPG that revolutionised the genre with its branching story and replayability.

97
GEOMETRY WARS
Format 360, Xbox **Pub** Microsoft
Dev Bizarre Creations **Year** 2003

Originally a minigame in Project Gotham Racing, this twin-stick shooter was responsible for popularising XBLA and, by extension, digital downloads on consoles.

96
ASSASSIN'S CREED II
Format PC, PS3, 360, Xbox **Pub** Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft
Year 2007

Introduced the charismatic Ezio Auditore and refined the sandbox template for a generation and beyond via Venice, Florence, and Tuscany.

95
BALDUR'S GATE II
Format PC **Pub** Black Isle
Dev Bioware **Year** 2000

You led a party of six in this early, pre-Mass Effect/Dragon Age showcase of Bioware's skill at creating unforgettably nuanced characters and densely layered narratives.

94
MEGA MAN
Format NES **Pub** Capcom
Dev Capcom **Year** 1987

While most players got to grips with gaming via plumbers and hedgehogs, Mega Man gave many their first real challenge. Notable also for being one of the first focal points for speed-runners.

93
EARTHBOUND
Format SNES **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Ape, HAL Laboratories **Year** 1994

A cult classic, which cemented Nintendo great Satoru Iwata as a programming legend and proved one of the formative JRPGs of the NES era.

92
GUITAR HERO
Format PS2 **Pub** Red Octane
Dev Harmonix **Year** 2005

The title that made big plastic peripherals profitable, popularised rhythm action, and gave music a viable videogame platform.

91
METROID PRIME
Format GameCube **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Retro Studios **Year** 2002

One of the most successful genre conversions ever, letting you step more immersively into Samus' space shoes than ever before.

THAT THE WORLD

influential, most important games ever...

90
UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Format PC
Pub GT Interactive
Dev Epic **Year** 1999

Seriously fast, bloody, and satisfying first-person shooting that set a new benchmark for competitive PvP action in videogames.

89
RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Format PS3, 360
Pub Rockstar Games
Dev Rockstar San Diego
Year 2010

So much more than just GTA in the Wild West, Red Dead's world felt uniquely authentic and alive. To this day fans still cry out for a sequel.

88
ULTIMA

Format Apple II
Pub Origin Systems
Dev Richard Gariott
Year 1981

One of the first commercially available RPGs, Richard Garriott's adventure fused first-person dungeon-crawling with a top-down open world in a way never before seen.

87
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

Format PS1
Pub Activision
Dev Neversoft **Year** 1999

Addictive score-attack skating responsible for turning an underground counterculture into a bona-fide mainstream craze.

86
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Format PC, PS3, 360 **Pub** Bethesda
Dev Bethesda **Year** 2006

Here Bethesda truly set the template for its open-worlds, with a title that combined spectacle and freedom to an unprecedented degree.

85
SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Format PC **Pub** EA
Dev Irrational Games **Year** 1999

This early step in Bioshock developer Ken Levine's career combined the FPS and RPG genres like never before.

84
KING'S QUEST

Format IBM PCjr **Pub** IBM
Dev Sierra On-Line **Year** 1983

Kick started the golden era of adventure games, with clever puzzles, pioneering pseudo-3D environments, and trailblazing animation.

83
MYST

Format Mac **Pub** Broderbund
Dev Cyan **Year** 1993

This point-and-clicker put players on a mysterious, puzzle-filled island. Its stunning backgrounds were a massive achievement at the time, and helped introduce a whole new audience to the world of gaming.

82
STAR WARS KOTOR

Format Xbox **Pub** LucasArts
Dev Bioware **Year** 2003

Modern Bioware starts with this incredible RPG, which ultimately inspired the studio to create its own sci-fi universe.

81
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

Format Game Boy **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 1993

One of Nintendo's prized creators, Yoshiaki Koizumi (creator of Super Mario Galaxy) cut his teeth on this fantastic portable take on Zelda.

80
MAX PAYNE

Format PC, Xbox, PS2 **Pub** Rockstar
Dev Remedy **Year** 2001

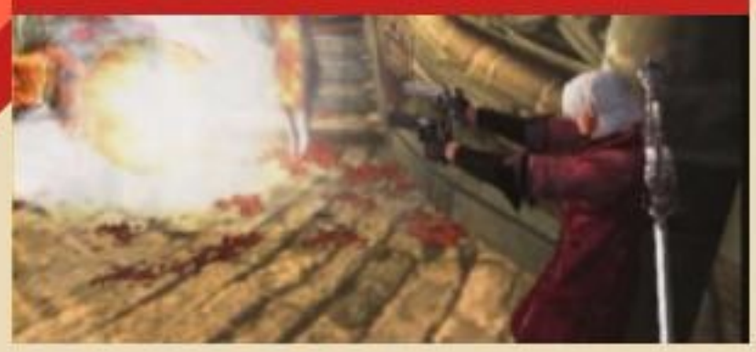
Popularised bullet-time battles with its balletic, John Woo-inspired combat.

Feature

On The Cover!

79
DEVIL MAY CRY
Format PS2 **Pub** Capcom
Dev Capcom **Year** 2001

Fluid hack-and-slashing that invented the genre the likes of Bayonetta and Metal Gear Rising Revengeance would later occupy.



78
METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER
Format PS2 **Pub** Konami
Dev Konami **Year** 2004

Big Boss donned camouflage and answered the call of nature for Kojima's stealthy prequel, with inspirational new survival mechanics.

77
COMMAND & CONQUER
Format PC **Pub** EA
Dev Westwood Studios
Year 1995

Several playable factions in parallel campaigns gave real-time strategy a kick up the bum.

76
BRAID
Format 360
Pub Microsoft
Dev Number None
Year 2008

Space-time-altering puzzles and a multi-faceted story widened the horizons of indie development, and this remains a landmark 'art game'.

75
POPULOUS
Format PC, SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Master System, Amiga, Atari ST
Pub EA **Dev** Bullfrog Productions **Year** 1989

A single title that established not only the god game as a genre, but the status of Peter Molyneux as a game designer.

74
UNCHARTED 2
Format PS3 **Pub** Sony
Dev Naughty Dog **Year** 2009

Swashbuckling set pieces, globetrotting drama, and sheer visual spectacle in one polished package that changed triple-A games forever.

73
THEME PARK
Format PC, PS1, Saturn, Jaguar, 3DO, Mega CD, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga **Pub** EA
Dev Bullfrog Productions **Year** 1994

Bullfrog's management sim substituted spreadsheet complexity for streamlined quirkiness, paving the way for the raft of jaunty administration games to come, now so common from the App Store to Early Access.

72
SUPER SMASH BROS
Format N64 **Pub** Nintendo
Dev HAL Laboratory **Year** 1999

Smash Bros. came out of leftfield to invent the mascot brawler, popularise the four-player fighting game, and open up the genre to Joe Public.

71
EVERQUEST
Format PC **Pub** Sony
Dev Sony **Year** 1999

It may not have been the first fantasy MMO, but Everquest's popularity cast a mould for the genre.

70
FIFA 09
Format PC, Mobile, PS3, Wii, 360, PSP, DS, Xbox, PS2
Pub EA **Dev** EA Canada **Year** 2008

The birth of Ultimate Team changed sports games forever, and is a staple to this day.

69
LEMMINGS

Format PC, Amiga CD32, SNES, CD-I, Game Gear, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Master System, NES, Amiga, Atari ST, Amstrad CPC, C64, Spectrum
Pub Psygnosis **Dev** DMA Design **Year** 1991

A triumph of open-ended design from the studio that would go on to make Grand Theft Auto.

68
THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT
Format PC **Pub** Eidos Interactive
Dev Looking Glass Studios **Year** 1998

Eschewing confrontation for light and sound-based stealth, this steampunk sneaker also introduced gamers to Ken Levine's writing.

67
RATCHET & CLANK
Format PS2 **Pub** Sony
Dev Insomniac Games **Year** 2002

A colourful fusion of platforming and action, and a graphical showcase for Sony's hardware.

66
JAK & DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY
Format PS2 **Pub** Sony
Dev Naughty Dog **Year** 2001

The starting point of Naughty Dog's crazed technical ambition was this seamless, connected world of 3D platforming stages.

65
BANJO-KAZOOIE
Format N64 **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Rare **Year** 1998

Rare's attempts to beat Nintendo at its own 3D platforming game produced this wildly imaginative outing.

64
CRASH BANDICOOT
Format PS1 **Pub** Sony
Dev Naughty Dog **Year** 1996

Sony's answer to Mario and Sonic, and the first indication of Naughty Dog's knack for spectacle.

63
HALF-LIFE
Format PC **Pub** Sierra Entertainment
Dev Valve **Year** 1998

An experiment in world building that revolutionised narrative in games by eschewing cutscenes in favour of environmental storytelling.

62
BIOSHOCK
Format PC, PS3, 360 **Pub** 2K Games
Dev 2K Boston **Year** 2007

2K's horror opus brought earnest philosophising to the triple-A shooter, and proved a demand for intelligent blockbusters in the process.

61
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Format SNES **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo EAD **Year** 1992

The game that perfected and cemented the Zelda template, as well as establishing a dual worlds motif that many games would go on to pinch.

60
QUAKE
Format PC, N64, Saturn, Amiga **Pub** GT Interactive
Dev Id Software **Year** 1996

Doom may have popularised the FPS, but Quake brought the genre a giant leap closer to its current form, introducing fully 3D environments and accumulating a community of online deathmatch aficionados.

59
FINAL FANTASY X

Format PS2 **Pub** Sony
Dev Square **Year** 2002

Square's PS2 debut ditched the traditional JRPG overworld in favour of lavish 3D environments and a fully voice-acted narrative, establishing a new template for role-playing epics.

58
PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME
Format PC, GameCube, Xbox, PS2 **Pub:** Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal
Year 2003

The wall-running royal augmented his acrobatics with the ability to rewind time, a power that's been pilfered by all sorts of games ever since.

57
MORTAL KOMBAT
Format PC, Mega CD, SNES, Game Gear, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Master System, Amiga, Arcade **Pub** Virgin
Dev Midway Games **Year** 1992

A fighting game so controversially violent at the time that it essentially spawned modern videogame rating systems.

56
ELITE
Format PC, NES, Amiga, Atari ST, Amstrad CPC, C64, Spectrum, BBC Micro **Pub** Acornsoft
Dev Ian Bell, David Braben **Year** 1984

A pioneering work of open-ended design, inviting players to explore an enormous universe of seemingly endless possibility.

55
RESIDENT EVIL
Format PC, PS1, Saturn **Pub** Capcom
Dev Capcom **Year** 1996

Shuffling zombies, scarce resources, tank controls, and fixed camera angles – this was the game that defined a genre for a decade.

54
LEFT 4 DEAD
Format PC, 360 **Pub** Valve
Dev Turtle Rock Studios **Year** 2008

Co-op was nothing new in 2008, but this shooter ditched epic narrative in favour of an AI 'director' to ensure every playthrough felt fresh.

53
HALO 2
Format Xbox **Pub** Microsoft
Dev Bungie **Year** 2004

Established not just the template for online shooters on console, but also Xbox Live itself.

52
SUPER MARIO KART
Format SNES **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo EAD **Year** 1993

The father of the kart racer – and the series has been fending off all opposition ever since.

51
SUPER MARIO WORLD
Format SNES **Pub** Nintendo **Dev** Nintendo EAD **Year** 1992

Sega may have beat Nintendo to market with the Mega Drive, but Nintendo shot back with perhaps the greatest launch game of any console ever.

50
DIABLO
Format PC, PS1 **Pub** Ubisoft
Dev Blizzard North **Year:** 1997

Took a typically sedate genre and gave it a shot of adrenaline, swapping chin-stroking tactics for clickety action and procedural generation.

49
WOLFENSTEIN 3D
Format PC, Jaguar, SNES **Pub** Apogee Software
Dev Id Software **Year** 1992

Before Doom, this frenetic blaster essentially invented the modern first-person shooter.

48
SILENT HILL 2
Format PC, Xbox, PS2 **Pub** Konami
Dev Konami **Year** 2001

Rather than concentrating on jump scares and ammo conservation, Konami's survival horror sequel delivered its shivers by turning inwards, depicting the misshapen, sexualised enemies as projections of the protagonist's damaged psyche.

47
OUTRUN
Format Master System, Arcade **Pub** Sega
Dev Sega AM2 **Year** 1986

Although top-down 2D racers had been popular for some time, Yu Suzuki's arcade phenomenon offered a peerless sensation of speed by positioning the player right behind the action.

46
PORTAL
Format PC, PS3, 360 **Pub** Valve
Dev Valve **Year** 2007

Valve's comedy puzzler wasn't just an astonishing anthology of headscratchers, it was also a masterpiece of focus and restraint, an early example of the possibilities afforded by digital distribution to produce games of all scales.

45
ANIMAL CROSSING
Format GameCube **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 2004

Nintendo's experiment in life management ran at its own gentle pace, and expected players to check in regularly for short, soothing sessions – a pattern of play that's since been exploited, for better or worse, by mobile developers.

44
DEUS EX
Format PC, PS2 **Pub** Eidos Interactive
Dev Ion Storm **Year** 2000

Today it seems every game is a mongrel, and first-person titles in particular are often hybrid blends of RPG levelling and open-world influences. It was this cyberpunk shooter that set the precedent for today's creative cross-breeds.

43
DONKEY KONG
Format NES, Arcade **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 1981

After a handful of moderate successes in the arcade space, this was the game that cemented Nintendo's commitment to gaming and spawned the company's mascot in one fell swoop.

Feature

On The Cover!

42
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Format PC, PS3, 360 **Pub** Eidos Interactive
Dev Rocksteady Studios **Year** 2009

Rocksteady's take on the Batman didn't just launch a franchise, it served as a major inspiration for just about every third-person action game released since, with its free-flowing combat being nabbed wholesale by any number of other developers.

41
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
Format PC, Amiga, Atari ST **Pub** LucasArts
Dev LucasArts **Year** 1990

As well as being a tremendous example of LucasArts' comedy and craft in its own right, Ron Gilbert's piratical adventure shored up the genre foundations that led us all the way to Telltale's The Walking Dead today.

40
WII SPORTS
Format Wii **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 2006

The perfect showcase for the Wii's motion controls, and an app so killer it single-handedly made the console a crossover hit.

39
WIPEOUT
Format PS1 **Pub** Psygnosis
Dev Psygnosis **Year** 1995

With an aesthetic brainstormed by graphic designers and a techno soundtrack starring The Chemical Brothers, this future-set anti-gravity racer was PlayStation's style icon.

38
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
Format Mega Drive **Publisher** SEGA
Dev Sonic Team **Year** 1991

For a time this speedy blue hedgehog was bigger than Mario, and that's down to a platformer-cum-racer that made the competition look positively pedestrian by comparison.

37
MASS EFFECT 2
Format PC, 360, PS3 **Pub** Bioware
Dev Bioware **Year** 2007

The game that defined the Bioware RPG, mixing an expansive, wonderfully-realised universe, engaging dialogues, and a hefty dollop of genuinely affecting moral choices with hard-hitting third-person shooter action.

36
SHENMUE
Format Dreamcast **Pub** SEGA
Dev SEGA AM2 **Year** 1999

Open worlds are ten a penny these days, but back then the chance to wander a fully realised Japanese town, interacting with arcade machines, driving a forklift, and challenging locals to arm wrestling contests, was truly revolutionary.

35
TEAM FORTRESS 2
Format PC, 360, PS3 **Pub** Valve
Dev Valve **Year** 2007

Multiplayer competition that continues to evolve with the times, morphing from a simple class-based shooter to an enormously successful, free-to-play juggernaut, complete with player mods and its own hat-based economy.

34
STARCRAFT
Format PC **Pub** Blizzard
Dev Blizzard **Year** 1998

The real-time strategy game so perfectly competitive that it essentially defined esports forever, and remains South Korea's national obsession to this day.

33
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
Format NES **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 1986

This fantasy adventure not only helped cement Nintendo as the gaming giant it is today, but laid the groundwork for countless genres to come, from open-world games to RPGs.

32
SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS
Format PS2 **Pub** Sony
Dev Team Ico **Year** 2005

No game yet has matched this classic's incredible sense of scale, let alone its uniquely melancholy atmosphere and beautifully stark art style – though not for lack of trying.

31
SIMCITY
Format PC, SNES, Amiga, Atari ST **Pub** Maxis
Dev Maxis **Year** 1989

A now sprawling family of Sim games started here, with a city builder that defined the management genre, and popularised open-ended gaming like never before.

30
ANGRY BIRDS
Format Mobile **Pub** Chillingo
Dev Rovio **Year** 2009

Breakout hits don't come much bigger than this casual mobile game turned household name, now so popular there's even a movie on the way.

29
PAC-MAN
Format Arcade **Pub** Namco
Dev Namco **Year** 1980

A triumph of arcade gaming purity that spawned the first true gaming mascot, and made its influence felt on countless genre-defining titles to follow. It's impossible to imagine videogames without it.

28
LEAGUE OF LEGENDS
Format PC **Dev** Riot
Pub Riot **Year** 2009

The latest League Of Legends championship drew millions of fans, and awarded millions more in money to the overall victor. This early MOBA not only popularised what is now one of the most successful genres in gaming, but also helped turn esports into an ever-growing global sensation.

27
CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
Format PS1 **Dev** Konami
Pub Konami **Year** 1997

A darkly gothic platformer which, like Metroid, perfectly melded open-world and linear gameplay with its ability-gated environments. So good they (half) named a genre after it – the Metroidvania.

26
CIVILISATION

Format PC, Saturn, SNES, Amiga, Atari ST
Dev MPS Labs
Pub MicroProse **Year** 1991

Thousands, if not millions of lives were in your hands as you built your nation from a humble settlement into a network of thriving cities – and witnessed the birth of the modern 4X genre.

25
GRAN TURISMO

Format PS1 **Pub** Sony
Dev Sony **Year** 1997

An authentic car sim in a period when the arcade racer reigned supreme, and the first to make truly realistic racing a mainstream hit.

24
THE SIMS

Format PC **Pub** EA
Dev Maxis **Year** 2000

Truly progressive, both in its gameplay and its politics, with an inclusive approach that welcomed female gamers and normalised gay marriage. The Sims proved games could be for everyone.

23
GOLDENEYE 007

Format N64 **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Rare **Year** 1997

Rare's gold-standard Bond game brought the previously PC-only first-person shooter, and the definitive splitscreen experience, to consoles. If you owned an N64, chances are you've played deathmatch on Facility.

22
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

Format PC, PS3, 360 **Pub** Activision
Dev Infinity Ward **Year** 2007

From its set-piece-driven campaign to a silky 60fps multiplayer that constantly rewarded players with perks and rank-ups, you can thank this classic for shaping almost every multiplayer shooter – and many non-shooters – ever since.

21
MORROWIND

Format PC, Xbox **Pub** Bethesda
Dev Bethesda **Year** 2002

The unrestricted scope and scale of this massive RPG showed gamers exactly what Bethesda was capable of, and its presence can still be felt in the studio's open-world epics today.

20
GEARS OF WAR

Format 360 **Pub** Microsoft
Dev Epic **Year** 2006

From roadie-running, to cover-snapping, to campaign co-op, to brutal multiplayer, this third-person shooter grabbed the genre by the throat and battered it into the shape it still has today – and as an Xbox-exclusive it single-handedly boosted the value of the console.

19
ICO

Format PS2 **Pub** Sony
Dev Team Ico **Year** 2001

Unique, minimalist, and unabashedly elegant, this puzzle-platforming tale of boy meets girl, boy saves girl from castle containing shadow monsters, ruthlessly stripped out anything that detracted from its core conceit, and inspired a generation of developers to see games as art like never before.

18
FINAL FANTASY VII

Format PS1 **Pub** Square
Dev Square **Year** 1997

The JRPG that made western audiences sit up and take notice, and introduced expansive, pre-rendered 3D environments to a previously top-down genre. Aeris' death remains a shared emotional touchstone for gamers everywhere to this day.

17
TOMB RAIDER

Format PS1, Saturn **Pub** Eidos Interactive **Dev** Core Design **Year** 1996

She may not exactly have been a nuanced feminist icon, looking back, but when this third-person action adventure brought Lara Croft into the world, her role as gaming's female action hero was genuinely revolutionary. Before long she was a household name; videogames' first real celebrity, her face plastered across the cover of even mainstream magazines, and her place in history forever secured.

16
STREET FIGHTER II

Format Arcade, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga, Atari ST **Pub** Capcom **Dev** Capcom **Year** 1991

The first word, and for many the last, in on-the-couch multiplayer. Taking the first entry's ball and running with it, this tight brawler defined the genre as we know it today with its roster of colourful characters and intense tactical depth. For a good many years, fighting games were king, and that lasting craze can be traced right back here – and, what do you know, its spiritual successor Street Fighter IV revived the genre for the present day, too.

15
SUPER METROID

Format SNES **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Intelligent Systems **Year** 1994

The other half of the duo that defined the Metroidvania, this sci-fi platformer is where it all started. Inventive abilities and rewarding exploration made this a game still evoked by the likes of Rocksteady's Batman games today, and spawned a series so enduring it even survived the transition into 3D first-person shooting.

14
WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Format PC **Pub** Blizzard
Dev Blizzard **Year** 2004

This is the highest-grossing videogame of all time, generating over 10 billion dollars since launch and boasting 5.6 million subscribers – and you can see why. Its incredible world and smart, accessible systems set a standard the competition still struggles to meet today, bringing the MMO into the mainstream with such force that even now developers continue to try to hop on its bandwagon.

13
HALF-LIFE 2

Format PC, PS3, 360, Xbox
Pub Valve **Dev** Valve **Year** 2004

"Shooters, meet physics" – that's what Valve said with Half-Life 2. It gave every body and object physical propeties, meaning you could fling saw blades with a Gravity Gun and, to a less violent end, play on some swings. At a time when other FPS games were inert movie sets, this was a world you could influence.

12
PONG

Format Arcade **Pub** Atari
Dev Atari **Year** 1972

The first sports arcade game needs no introduction. Originally a warm-up project for a new Atari employee, it was among the first to escape musty testing backrooms, and essentially launched the industry single-handed by showing other companies that there was money in this new-fangled gaming thing.

11
METAL GEAR SOLID

Format PS1 **Pub** Konami
Dev Konami **Year** 1998

This classic popularised stealth in games, set new standards for quality in sneaking, launched Kojima's career, revolutionised cinematic storytelling in games, and kicked off one of the industry's most popular, long-running series.

Feature

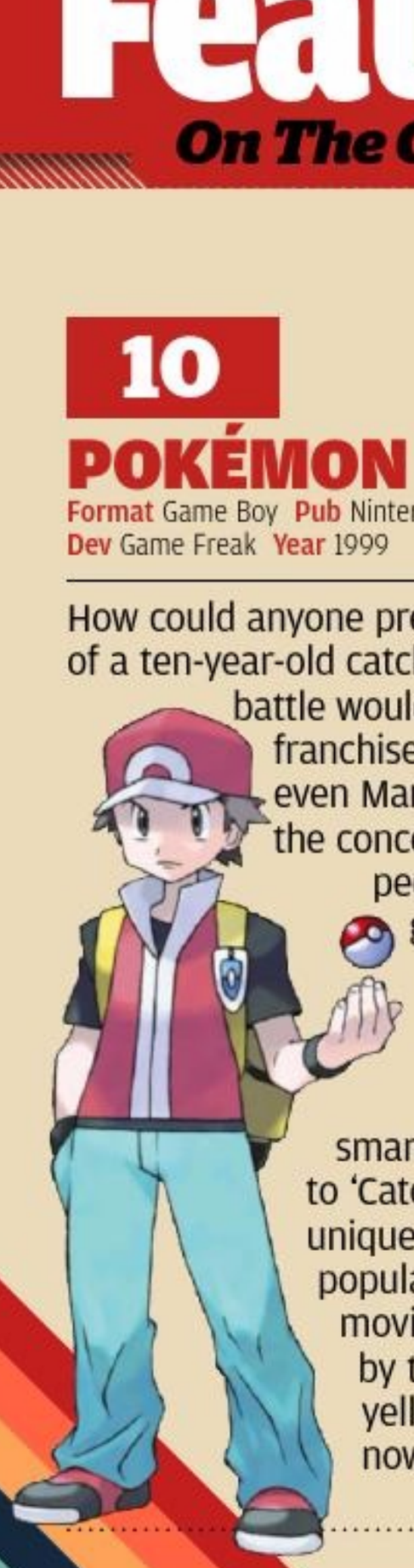
On The Cover!

10

POKÉMON RED/BLUE

Format Game Boy **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Game Freak **Year** 1999

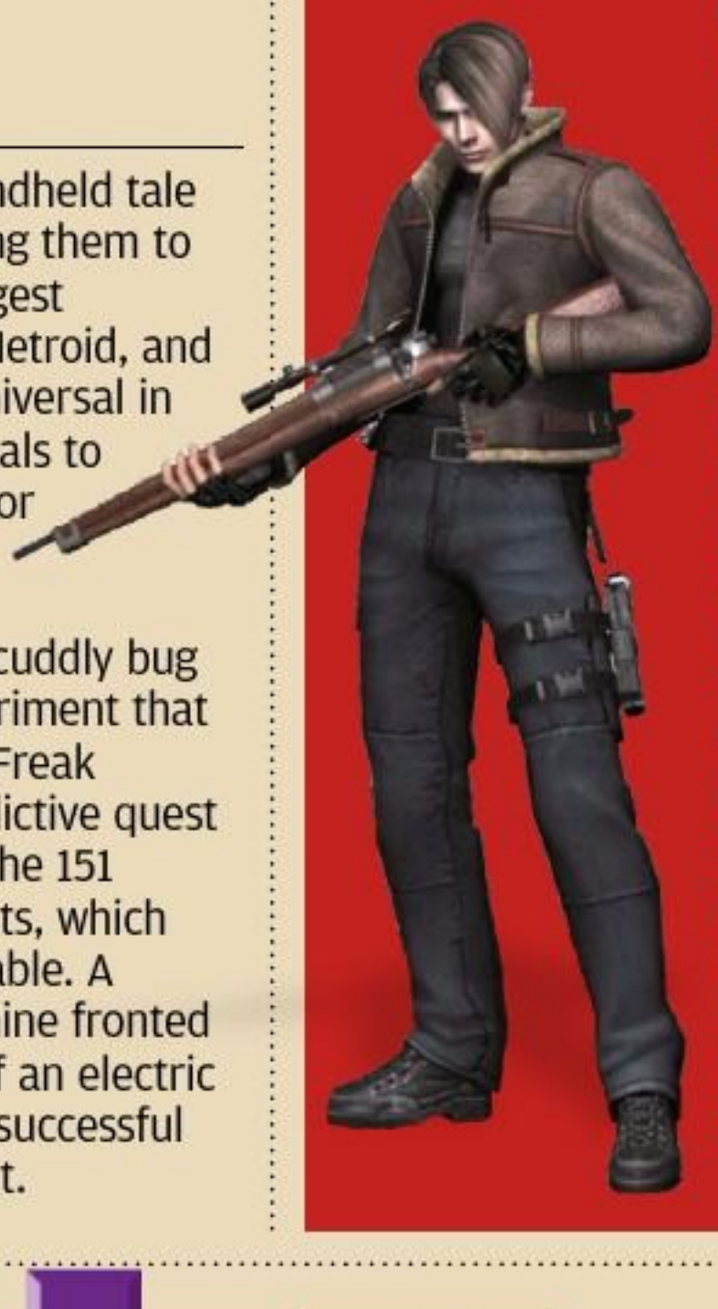
How could anyone predict that the humble handheld tale of a ten-year-old catching monsters and training them to battle would become Nintendo's biggest franchise by far, eclipsing Zelda, Metroid, and even Mario? There's something universal in the concept, a rare RPG that appeals to people no matter their age or gender. Everyone has a favourite Pokémon, whether it's a cute and cuddly bug or a scary science experiment that wants to kill you. Game Freak smartly capitalised on the addictive quest to 'Catch 'Em All' by spreading the 151 unique monsters across two carts, which popularised trading over link cable. A movie and merchandise machine fronted by the heart-warming face of an electric yellow hamster, that's more successful now than ever, was the result.



9

RESIDENT EVIL 4

Format GameCube, PS2 **Pub** Capcom
Dev Capcom Production Studio 4 **Year** 2005



Capcom's reinvention of its venerable survival horror franchise had far-reaching implications not only for the genre, but for third-person videogames of all kinds. The over-the-shoulder presentation has since become an industry standard, elegantly ushering in a new age of shooter mechanics, and paving the way for the likes of Marcus Fenix and Nathan Drake. But Capcom offered so much more than just a camera angle, delivering a truly cinematic take on the staid conventions of horror videogames while upping the ante in terms of narrative, AI, and grotesque creature design at the same time.

8

TETRIS

Format Game Boy **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 1989

It might have existed in one form or another slightly earlier than the infamous green-tinged monochrome affair that Nintendo cooked up on the cusp of the '90s, but it wasn't until the big N popped this tetromino-tumbling delight into our gaming palms that the world truly clocked onto the delights involved with lining up falling blocks.

The idea, back when the Game Boy launched, was to have Super Mario Land lead the charge, but while Nintendo knew that younger gamers would climb aboard, it was convinced by legendary gaming entrepreneur Henk Rogers (founder of The Tetris Company) that Tetris would be for everyone.

How right they were. Tetris' legacy is vast, ranging from legitimate raving tunes based on the infectious theme song (you'll have it in your head just having read this entry), all the way through to a pocket-busting 425 million-selling smartphone version. And everyone on the planet has a favourite Tetris block, right?

7

HALO

Format PC, Xbox **Pub** Microsoft
Dev Bungie **Year** 2002

While Goldeneye might be credited with popularising the console first-person shooter, Bungie's Xbox launch title was the first to truly nail it, launching as an astoundingly fully-formed implementation of almost everything we associate with the form to this day. Such was its influence that Halo's feature list reads like an inventory of modern FPS trends: recharging shields, trigger-mapped grenades, the two-weapon limit, and gun-butt melee attacks. Halo pioneered them all, along with precise twin-stick controls and a tremendous roster of pilotable vehicles. And as if all that wasn't enough, Halo can also be credited with driving the success of Microsoft's console ambitions, providing the gaming giant with a flagship franchise that endures to this day. To think it was originally planned as an RTS...

6

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Formats PC, PS2 **Pub** Rockstar
Dev DMA Design **Year** 2001

DMA Design's first foray into the third dimension was such an assured execution of the concept that Liberty City has served as a model of sandbox design for years, as well as kickstarting an industry-wide trend towards open worlds and player freedom that has infiltrated almost the entirety of triple-A gaming. Today's shooters, RPGs, and even racers are all expected to offer us vast playgrounds to tool around in, and the series' longstanding fascination with systems-led game design is proving equally influential in the current generation of games too. Just try to imagine Metal Gear Solid V in a world without GTA III. Unthinkable.

5

MINECRAFT

Format PC, PS4, XO, Wii U, PS3, 360, Vita, Mobile
Pub Mojang **Dev** Mojang **Year** 2009

There's never been a gaming phenomenon like Minecraft. From bedroom project to global sensation, the blocky builder has truly taken the world by storm, and established itself as the defining game of a whole new generation – not just to play, but even to watch, with so much of YouTube dedicated to it that it's putting cute cats out of business.

Procedural generation, crafting, exploration, survival, tools for allowing players to create their own content – Minecraft has established these concepts in gaming more strongly than ever before. Microsoft didn't shell out $2.5 billion for nothing – it's nabbed a share of the future.

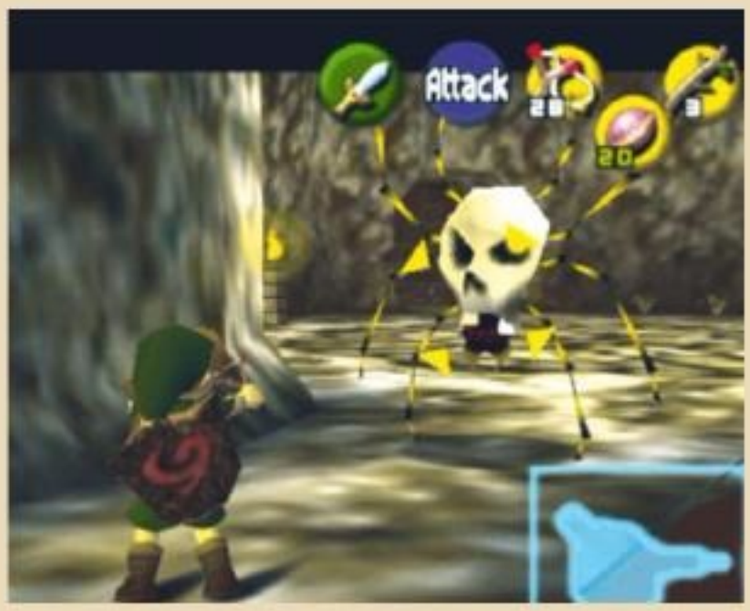
Feature
On The

4

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

Formats N64 **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo EAD **Year** 1998

At this point it's become something of a cliché to recount tales of childhood astonishment at Hyrule Field's scale or Epona's speed and grace. But these well-worn anecdotes are so oft-repeated because they're utterly true; Ocarina's 64-bit Hyrule was an incredible piece of world building, a characterful environ that players got to know inside-out over the course of an epic adventure. Sure, it invented the Z-trigger lock-on, and introduced a boatload of mechanical innovations, but Ocarina Of Time's true legacy is the formidably high bar it set future generations of 3D action-adventure games.



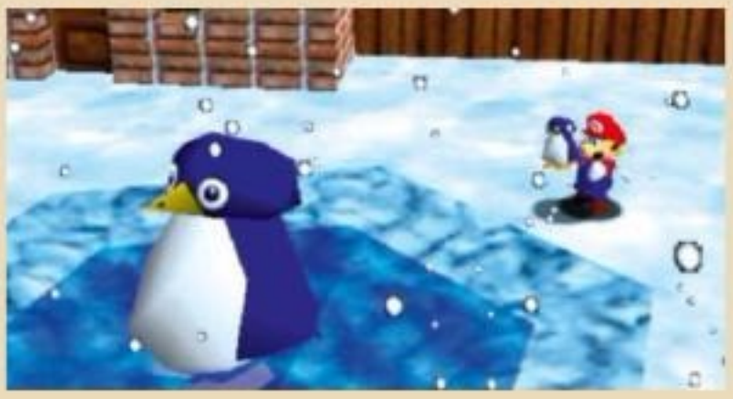
3

SUPER MARIO 64

Format N64 **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 1997

Younger gamers out there might wonder why tired veterans pine for ground-shaking innovations from Nintendo. Before successful experiments with motion controls and other... less successful dabblings, Nintendo wasn't just making games; it was setting industry standards.

Super Mario 64 bought 3D polygons into the spotlight. It gave us dynamic cameras which followed our avatar around whichever direction we chose to go. It gave us 360 degree analog controls via a stick. It gave us gaming's first foundation block for open worlds. Without Super Mario 64, gaming would look very different today. If you ask us, we need Nintendo's next game-changing innovation sharpish, to avoid a future, where Princess Peach's incredible castle, the delights of the triple jump, and Mario's Ravioli-inspired dreams are nothing but a memory...



2

DOOM

Formats PC, PS1, Jaguar, SNES **Pub** GT Interactive
Dev Id Software **Year** 1993

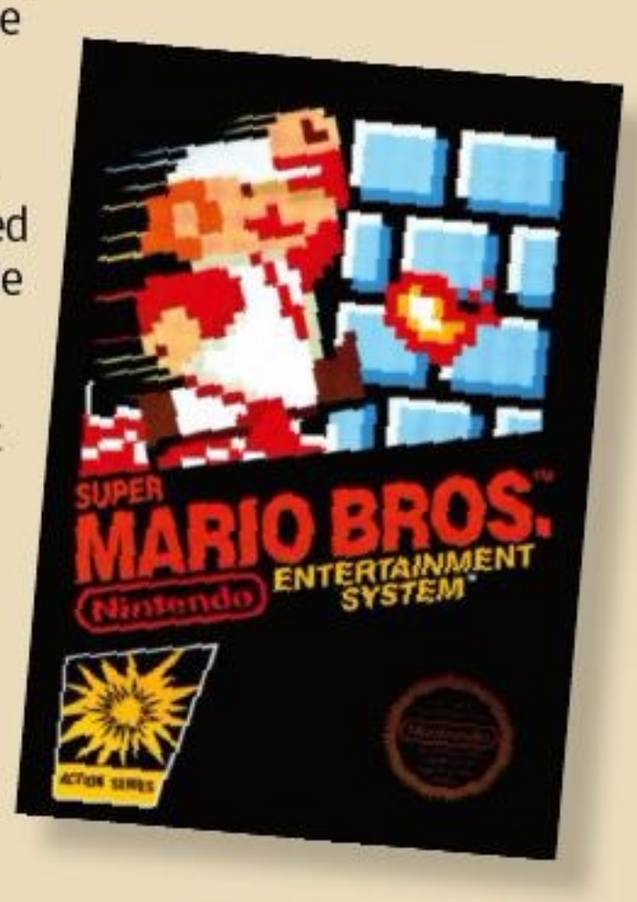
Wolfenstein 3D may have laid the groundwork, but Doom was the game that brought the first-person shooter firmly into the mainstream, establishing the genre not only for players, but for money-minded publishers. And while the first-person perspective may be practically ubiquitous in games today, it's easy to forget that there was a time when practically every FPS that came to market was dismissively labelled as a 'Doom clone'. How fortunate, then, that the game that galvanized parsimonious publishers seeking return on investment should have been such an excellent, energetic exercise in supremely satisfying shooting.

1 SUPER MARIO BROS

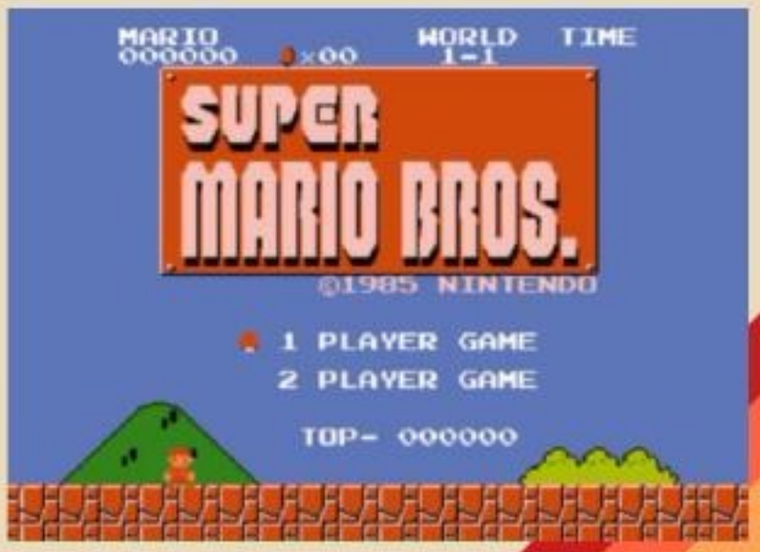
Format NES **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 1985

And so we come full circle – from the game that nearly killed videogames at 100, to the game that saved them at the top spot. In the early 1980s videogames were on the ropes: the market had crashed; revenues had dropped between 1983 and 1985 by a staggering 97% (imagine that portion of today's videogame market suddenly vanishing by 2018). Then along came Ninty, with a plumber-shaped defibrillator.

Super Mario Bros, developed by now legendary designers Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka, was the killer app for the NES. It compelled, through its brilliance, an entire generation of would-be gamers, worn down by rushed tie-ins, to trust in games once more; it delivered on Nintendo's Seal Of Quality, a badge of honour bestowed only to those titles that passed Nintendo's stringent tests; it changed completely people's perspective on the hobby, and birthed a new language for games, featuring design prowess that still holds up some three decades later (see how cack-thumbed most user-created Super Mario Maker levels end up being if you don't believe us). Entire essays have been written about the first few moments, which train you that mushrooms are good and Goombas are bad, and this is a game filled with such slices of incredible design. SMB ensured gaming survived past the '80s, and in the process set the wider industry on a path to greatness. We salute you, Super Mario Bros, for your service to us all – GamesMaster's most important game of all time.



“IT ENSURED GAMING SURVIVED PAST THE ’80S, AND SET THE INDUSTRY ON A PATH TO GREATNESS”



Our definitive list of the games you *need* to get in your system and wiggle your sticks at ASAP

100

We've cast our eye into the past and reveled in nostalgic gems – now it's time to look around and enjoy the present. It's a brilliant time to be a gamer, with so many wonderful titles on shelves these days that we can practically hear them groaning under the weight. We've gathered our 100 favourites, every one of them a modern classic you can't go wrong with. We're not talking the most important or influential games, or nailing down the objectively best titles – this is purely about which games you'll get most fun out of if you slip them into your machine of choice today. For this list, our rigorous and not at all arbitrary criteria is that each must have been released *after December 2010*. Once again, head to p98 if you disagree with our picks!

100
LIFE IS STRANGE
Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360
Pub Square Enix
Dev DontNod Year 2015

This episodic graphic adventure steadily accelerates into one of the most emotionally engrossing stories around.

99
SAINTS ROW THE THIRD
Format PC, PS3, 360
Pub THQ Dev Volition
Year 2011

The city sandbox that refuses to take itself seriously, reveling in the simple fun of... well, messing about. Pure, riotous, explosive joy.

98
LITTLEBIGPLANET 3
Format PS4, PS3 Pub Sony
Dev Sumo Digital Year 2014

A game that hands you the tools to make your own fun – and in the time since release, the community has created absolute magic with them.

97
EVERYBODY'S GONE TO THE RAPTURE
Format PS4 Pub Sony
Dev Chinese Room Year 2015

One of the most perfectly realised places ever seen in a game. A beautiful and contemplative – yet chilling – little slice of English life.

96
ZERO ESCAPE: VIRTUE'S LAST REWARD
Format PS Vita, 3DS Pub Rising Star Games
Dev Chunsoft Year 2012

Branching storylines make this game of transporting your consciousness through time to change the future brilliantly replayable.

95
INVISIBLE INC
Format PS4, PC Pub Klei Entertainment
Dev Klei Entertainment Year 2015

Stealth receives a turn-based reinvention in this slick cyberpunk roguelike, resulting in the tensest heists you'll ever pull off.

94
DRIVECLUB
Format PS4 Pub Sony
Dev Evolution Year 2014

Join a crew and burn bike or car rubber over spectacular environments. Also: possibly the best rain in videogames.

93
THE JACKBOX PARTY PACK
Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3 Pub Jackbox Games Inc
Dev Jackbox Games Inc Year 2014

Charmingly funny writing, ingenious mechanics, and the inspired use of smartphones as controllers make this truly the best, and most accessible, party game collection around.

92
TITANFALL
Format PC, XO, 360 Pub EA
Dev Respawn Entertainment Year 2014

Massive mechs and madcap mobility combine to facilitate whirlwind multiplayer matchups across pleasingly vertical maps.

91
DUNGEON OF THE ENDLESS
Format PC, Mobile Pub Amplitude
Dev Amplitude Year 2014

A bizarre but brilliant hybrid of tower defence and roguelike whose tale of survivors on an alien world serves as a prequel to Endless Legend.

BEST GAMES TO PLAY RIGHT NOW

90
KERBAL SPACE PROGRAM
Format PC Pub Squad
Dev Squad Year 2015

Fulfil all those astronaut aspirations in this cheerful but satisfyingly tough NASA sim – as long as you can figure out how to get a ship off-world without it exploding...

89
FEZ
Format PC, 360, PS3
Dev Polytron Corporation
Pub Trapdoor Year 2012

Spin 2D levels in three dimensions to solve puzzles, and witness the genius of controversial developer Phil Fish unfold before you. Remember: when you think you've finished, you've only just started...

88
THE STANLEY PARABLE
Format PC
Pub Galactic Cafe
Dev Galactic Cafe Year 2013

An interactive meditation on storytelling, obedience, and player agency that's a great deal funnier than that description suggests.

87
XENOBLADE CHRONICLES
Format 3DS, Wii
Pub Nintendo
Dev Monolith Soft
Year 2011

A JRPG of rare invention and imagination, offering a novel battle system and sweeping vistas in a sci-fantasy world formed from the bodies of two endlessly warring gods.

86
GROW HOME
Format PC, PS4 Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Reflections Year 2015

A compact but innovative and infinitely charming adventure in which you grow and climb a colossal plant as endearingly wobbly robot BUD.

85
AFFORDABLE SPACE ADVENTURES
Format Wii U Pub Knapnok Games
Dev Knapnok Games Year 2015

This space-based puzzler displays vital ship functions on the Wii U gamepad, producing superb co-operative miscommunications.

84
THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM
Format PC, PS3, 360 Pub Bethesda
Dev Bethesda Year 2011

The open-world fantasy RPG that lets you off the leash on one of gaming's largest ever maps – and boasts an incredible library of user-made mods.

83
GONE HOME
Format PC, PS4, XO
Pub The Fullbright Company
Dev The Fullbright Company
Year 2013

Fullbright's atmospheric depiction of a deserted family home that lets you unravel its affecting mysteries at your own pace.

82
SUPER MARIO 3D LAND
Format 3DS Pub Nintendo
Dev Nintendo Year 2012

A fabulously colourful and creative outing that uses the handheld's 3D functionality to craft a completely new kind of Mario platformer.

81
MOUNT YOUR FRIENDS
Format PC, 360 Pub Stegersaurus Software Inc
Dev Stegersaurus Software Inc Year 2013

More than just a wagging member simulator, this surprise indie hit delivers genuinely intense local multiplayer competition as you clamber over one another and form a glorious man-mountain.

80
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOID
Format PC Pub Blizzard
Dev Blizzard Year 2015

The final chapter in a story almost two decades in the making, and the finest version of Blizzard's real-time strategy sensation to date.

Feature

On The Cover!

79

BASTION

Format PC, Mobile, PS4, PS Vita, 360
Pub Warner Bros Dev Supergiant Games
Year 2011

A gravelly, reactive narrator and an incredible soundtrack make this action-RPG truly special.

78

PERSONA 4 GOLDEN

Format PS Vita Pub NIS America
Dev Atlus Year 2013

The Vita may not have become the handheld home of triple-A franchises that Sony was hoping for, but Atlus's superlative JRPG justifies the console's existence single-handedly.

77

WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360
Pub Bethesda
Dev MachineGames
Year 2014

A surprisingly effective marriage of old school shooter mechanics and modern storytelling sensibilities that's by turns funny, bloody, and genuinely affecting.

76

ROGUE LEGACY

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS Vita, PS3
Pub Cellar Door Games
Dev Cellar Door Games
Year 2013

A charming, cartoonish roguelike with a genealogical twist that sees you adapting to successive generations' quirks and genetic faults.

75

MARK OF THE NINJA

Format PC, 360 Pub Microsoft
Dev Klei Entertainment Year 2012

Brutal and beautiful, Klei's sumptuous stealth platformer is an exercise in clandestine thrills.

74

CRUSADER KINGS II

Format PC Pub Paradox Interactive
Dev Paradox Development Studio Year 2012

Whereas most strategy games busy you with shuffling units around a battlefield, Paradox's medieval epic has you nurturing a dynasty like an emergent Game Of Thrones.

73

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Format PC, PS3, 360 Pub 2K Games
Dev Irrational Games Year 2013

Irrational's tale of alternate histories and quantum mechanics explores themes and ideas no other game even gestures towards.

72

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

Format PC, Wii U, PS3, 360 Pub Square Enix
Dev Eidos Montreal Year 2011

A daring reinvention of an imposing original, Adam Jensen's dystopian debut offers all the open-ended action you could hope for.

71

CRYPT OF THE NECRODANCER

Format PC, PS4, PS Vita Pub Klei Entertainment
Dev Brace Yourself Games Year 2015

Roguelike conventions jig and jive alongside tight rhythm-action gameplay in this top-down, dungeon-crawling hoedown.

70

BORDERLANDS 2

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS Vita, PS3, 360
Pub 2K Games Dev Gearbox Software Year 2012

Class-based co-operative shooting, the allure of madcap loot, and an utterly insane cast of characters combined in a delicious blend.

69

ENDLESS LEGEND

Format PC Pub Iceberg Interactive
Dev Amplitude Year 2014

Turn-based 4X action in a surprisingly engaging sci-fantasy world of unique and wildly divergent factions, from nomadic merchants riding giant scarabs to diplomatic pacifist dragons.

68

SHOVEL KNIGHT

Format PC, PS4, XO, Wii U, PS Vita, 3DS, PS3 Pub Yacht Club Games
Dev Yacht Club Games Year 2014

It may ape an 8-bit aesthetic, but this is no empty exercise in nostalgia. Pure platforming pleasure.

67

SOMA

Format PC, PS4 Pub Frictional Games
Dev Frictional Games Year 2015

A terrifying rumination on artificial intelligence and the nature of being that trades as much on creeping existential dread as jump scares.

66

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

Format PC, PS3, 360 Pub 2K Games
Dev Yager Development Year 2012

This stunning shooter turns a mirror on violence in videogames. Two words: White. Phosphorous.

65

GALAK-Z: THE DIMENSIONAL

Format PC, PS4 Pub 17-BIT
Dev 17-BIT Year 2015

A rapid-fire, space-based twin-stick shooter roguelike that slickly evokes '80s anime.

64

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

Format Wii Pub Nintendo
Dev Nintendo Year 2011

The fulfilment of Nintendo's motion-controlled ambitions and another remarkable instalment in a venerable franchise in one vibrant package.

63

HEARTHSTONE: HEROES OF WARCRAFT

Format PC, Mobile Pub Blizzard
Dev Blizzard Year 2014

Blizzard's collectible card game is colourful, uniquely accessible, and, crucially, has a genuine sense of fun.

62

UNTIL DAWN

Format PS4 Pub Sony
Dev Supermassive Games Year 2015

Sexy teens revisit the isolated cabin where two of their sexy buddies disappeared a year ago. What could possibly go wrong?

61
PAPERS, PLEASE

Format PC, Mobile
Pub 3909 **Dev** Lucas Pope
Year 2013

An affecting depiction of bureaucratic cruelty in a world of suffering. These documents pack a surprisingly powerful punch.

60
PROFESSOR LAYTON VS. PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY
Format 3DS **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Level-5 **Year** 2014

A winsome little hybrid of fiendish brainteasers and high-stakes cross-examination featuring two of our favourite investigators.

59
RAYMAN LEGENDS
Format PC, PS4, XO, Wii U, PS Vita, PS3, 360
Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montpellier
Year 2013

A beautiful slice of platforming exuberance, bursting with content and brought to life by fluid animation and a cast of colourful characters.

58
YEAR WALK
Format PC, Mobile, Wii U
Pub Simogo **Dev** Simogo
Year 2013

An interactive engagement with Swedish folklore, with a brilliantly ominous atmosphere and tremendous layered 2D art.

57
THE BINDING OF ISAAC: REBIRTH
Format PC, PS4, XO, Wii U, PS Vita, 3DS **Pub** Nicalis
Dev Nicalis and Edmund McMillen **Year** 2014

An accomplished remake of an already excellent original, Rebirth's gross-out exterior hides an incredibly deep and varied roguelike.

56
DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION
Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360
Pub EA **Dev** BioWare
Year 2014

After a muddled second entry, Bioware's fantasy RPG series returns to prominence with this accomplished and compelling third outing, boasting an impressively varied open world.

55
BROTHERS: A TALE OF TWO SONS
Format PC, Mobile, PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** 505 Games
Dev Starbreeze Studios
Year 2013

Mechanically innovative as well as emotionally poignant, Starbreeze's handsome little adventure is a touching exploration of grief and family.

54
DIABLO III
Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** Blizzard
Dev Blizzard **Year** 2012

Blizzard returns to and redefines the action-RPG it once created with this confident, polished effort – and thanks to post-game support, it's a better experience now than ever.

53
FIFA 16
Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360
Pub EA Sports
Dev EA Canada **Year** 2015

The instalment in the blockbuster sporting franchise, featuring the ever-compulsive Ultimate Team and, for the first time, women's matches.

52
FINAL FANTASY XIV: HEAVENSWARD
Format PC, PS4, PS3 **Pub** Square Enix
Dev Square Enix **Year** 2013

The epic MMO that proves the genre can work on consoles to spectacular effect – and with its latest massive update, it's only gotten more impressive.

51
MONSTER HUNTER 4 ULTIMATE

Format 3DS **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Capcom **Year** 2015

A marvellous mix of stalking and crafting, and the most agitated we've gotten about hunting since Cecil the lion. With the addition of online play, this is the pinnacle of its own strange genre.

50
SUPER SMASH BROS FOR WII U
Format Wii U **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Sora Ltd, Bandai Namco Games **Year** 2014

An almost absurdly generous bundle of variegated pugilism, and a spirited spectacle to behold. Nintendo has even managed to include a serviceable suite of online modes alongside the peerless local mutliplayer.

49
TO THE MOON
Format PC **Pub** Freebird Games
Dev Freebird Games **Year** 2011

Created in RPG Maker but with nary a stats screen in sight, this is a beautifully thoughtful exploration of memory, loss, and regret. Imagine a bittersweet Inception with 16-bit graphics.

48
ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV
Format PC, PS4, PS3, 360 **Pub** Capcom
Dev Capcom **Year** 2014

A lavish collection of 44 complex and colourful characters, as well as a host of accumulated gameplay refinements. Simply put, the definitive edition of the best fighting game of its generation.

47
80 DAYS
Format PC, Mobile **Pub** Inkle
Dev Inkle **Year** 2014

As artful an example of branching narrative as you're likely to see in a game, Inkle's steampunk adventure is not only brilliantly written, but also amazingly reactive to your choices.

46
BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT
Format PC, PS4, XO **Pub** Warner Bros
Dev Rocksteady Studios **Year** 2015

After the lukewarm Arkham Origins, Rocksteady returns to restore Batman to his former glory. Improvements to the combat and puzzles impress, but it's Gotham itself and the freakish cast of characters that make Arkham Knight a gloomy treat.

45
FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT
Format PC, Mobile **Pub** Subset Games
Dev Subset Games **Year** 2012

Subset's intergalactic roguelike facilitates a fraught sort of sci-fi storytelling, as you exchange laser-fire with aliens and fight fires across your crumbling ship, all while desperately trying to outrun the rebel fleet that inexorably pursues you.

44
LUIGI'S MANSION 2: DARK MOON
Format 3DS **Pub:** Nintendo
Dev: Next Level Games, Nintendo SPD **Year** 2013

Every room in every one of these eerie residences is a fetching little diorama; exquisitely detailed, engagingly interactive, and often host to plenty of secrets too. Bustin' makes us feel good.

Feature

On The Cover!

43

HEROES OF THE STORM

Format PC **Pub** Blizzard
Dev Blizzard **Year** 2015

If you've yet to dip a toe into those formidable MOBA waters, this is perhaps the friendliest place yet to start, offering an approachable level of complexity alongside a familiar cast of beloved Blizzard characters to play as.

42

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

Format XO **Pub** Microsoft
Dev 343 Industries **Year** 2015

The Chief's first foray into the current generation of hardware horsepower is marked as much by its cracking campaign and the superb new Warzone mode as it is by the manifold advancements in extraterrestrial prettiness.

41

DOTA 2

Format PC **Pub** Valve
Dev: Valve **Year** 2013

It may not be the most accessible of the current MOBA crop, but that steep learning curve is rewarded with a tremendous amount of depth, an abundance of tactical opportunity, and some of the most exciting esports around.

40

UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION

Format PS3 **Pub** Sony
Dev Naughty Dog **Year** 2011

A search for a lost city of immeasurable wealth may form the premise of this swashbuckling, adventure, but it's the tight combat, tense traversal, and spectacular set pieces that elevate it into something enduringly special.

39

TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS

Format PC, Mobile, PS4, XO, PS3, 360
Pub Telltale Games **Dev** Telltale Games **Year** 2014

Telltale's formula is well established at this point, but its creative collaboration with Gearbox has produced some of its finest work to date – a combination of well-judged comedy, satisfying narrative, and ludicrous spectacle.

38

NIDHOGG

Format PC, PS4, PS Vita **Pub** Messhof **Dev** Messhof
Year 2014

An impossibly tense tug-of-war between two pixelated swordsmen, and a superbly simple challenge of tactics, reflexes, and psychological intimidation. All for the chance to be gobbled up by a giant worm. Local multiplayer perfection.

37

ALIEN: ISOLATION

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** Sega
Dev Creative Assembly **Year** 2014

Perhaps the only videogame to ever successfully attach the appropriate sense of terror to Ridley Scott's extraterrestrial creation, Creative Assembly's nerve-fraying first-person hide-a-thon achieves more with a single alien than Gearbox managed with thousands.

36

RESOGUN

Formats PS4, PS3, PS Vita **Pub** Sony
Dev Housemarque **Year** 2013

Housemarque rocked up to the PS4 launch with this luminescent side-scrolling shooter, which recreates the thrills of Defender in lurid neon and tumbling voxels. Slight, yes, but terrifically bright.

35

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

Format Wii U **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 2013

Another tremendously inventive outing for Nintendo's venerable mascot, and a masterclass in visual design. Mario himself has never looked better, of course, but it's the oddball enemies and vibrant playgrounds that dazzle.

34

TRIALS FUSION

Format PC, PS4, XO, 360 **Pub** Ubisoft
Dev RedLynx **Year** 2014

Demanding and bonkers in equal measure, this boisterous biking game accepts no error as you traverse its obstacle courses.

33

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF

Format 3DS **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 2013

Another pleasingly sedate instalment in gaming's most laid back franchise, New Leaf is a perfect fit for the 3DS, since its loveable looks and kooky characters can be within arm's reach at all hours.

32

ELITE DANGEROUS

Format PC, XO **Pub** Frontier Developments
Dev Frontier Developments **Year** 2015

This sprawling space sim is an ever-evolving world of trade, piracy, and exploration in an unfathomably large universe of connected players.

31

BATTLEFIELD 4

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** EA
Dev EA DICE **Year** 2013

A robust post-release campaign of patches and free DLC ensured that Battlefield 4's online community has lingered long, sticking around for the exhilarating large-scale scrapping, hefty roster of vehicles, and 'levolution'.

30

FAR CRY 4

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360
Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal
Year 2012

A wild open world replete with murderous fauna, bloodthirsty militias, and one psychotic wannabe dictator. Tense stealth and thumping gunplay round out a consummate package.

29

TEARAWAY

Format PS Vita **Pub** Sony
Dev Media Molecule **Year** 2013

This effortlessly charming papercraft adventure is a tactile, almost palpable pleasure thanks to the Vita's suite of touch-based inputs, which let the player tug and tear their way through the story.

28

MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** Warner Bros
Dev Monolith Productions **Year** 2014

The Nemesis System makes for an inspired addition to the genre, introducing an incredible layer of narrative and personality to the slick Assassin's Creed-meets-Batman encounters.

27
POKÉMON X AND Y

Format 3DS
Pub The Pokémon Company
Dev Game Freak **Year** 2013

Nintendo's cutesy cock-fighting simulator makes the transition from two-dimensional sprites to a fully 3D world with typical panache.

26
BAYONETTA 2

Format Wii U
Pub Nintendo
Dev Platinum Games
Year 2014

This Wii U exclusive is a riotous, ridiculous explosion of colour and camp, delivering a combat system that boasts a watchmaker's precision alongside all the exaggerated acrobatics and screwball sauciness.

25
FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING
Format 3DS **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Intelligent Systems **Year** 2013

The looming threat of permadeath returns, as does the tremendous tactical combat. Awakening also introduces a new focus on building relationships between your characters, who can pursue marital bliss and sweet battlefield dual attacks.

24
ROCK BAND 4
Formats PS4, XO **Pub** Harmonix, Mad Catz
Dev Harmonix **Year** 2015

Harmonix's return to plastic peripherals is simply one of the finest multiplayer experiences on the market, one that empowers its players to bask in the warm glow of make-believe musical mastery.

23
RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Format PC, XO, 360
Pub: Square Enix
Dev Crystal Dynamics
Year 2015

Snow-quilted Siberia makes for a stunning setting, but it's the host of subtle mechanical upgrades that elevates Lara's latest to essential status.

22
DISHONORED
Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** Bethesda
Dev Arkane Studios **Year** 2012

Arkane's unique, whale oil-powered steampunk world makes for an incredible backdrop to some of the smartest stealth gameplay in years.

21
BLOODBORNE
Format PS4 **Pub** Sony
Dev From Software **Year** 2015

Miyazaki's sanguine diversion trades medieval high gothic for Lovecraftian Victoriana, while plumping for a nippier, more aggressive combat system than any of the Souls games so far. The result is gory greatness.

20
HOTLINE MIAMI
Format PC, Mobile, PS4, PS3, PS Vita **Pub** Devolver Digital **Dev** Dennaton Games **Year** 2012

The crunch of gunfire and pounding basslines combine in this top-down bloodbath to produce a state of almost unmatched flow, supported by a hazy fug of seedy storytelling.

19
GUILD WARS 2
Format PC **Pub** NCSOFT
Dev Arenanet **Year** 2012

For so long World Of Warcraft has dominated the field of MMOs, but nothing is forever. As player migrate away from the Blizzard behemoth, this free-to-play refurbishment of the genre just keeps getting stronger and stronger.

18
PORTAL 2

Format PC, PS3, 360 **Pub** Valve
Dev Valve **Year** 2011

The original Portal was such a peerless four-hour package that many wondered whether the notion of a full-size sequel might be folly. Valve proved them wrong in spectacular style, producing a bundle of brainteasers and belly-laughs that meaningfully builds on its forebear without a hint of padding.

17
THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON 2
Format PC, Mobile, PS4, XO, PS3, 360, PS Vita
Pub Telltale Games **Dev** Telltale Games **Year** 2013

We all did a little 'huh?' when we heard Clem would take the spotlight in Telltale's return to the zombie-verse that made it. Little did we know how intensely moving her tale would become over five heart-wrenching episodes. Essential and unforgettable.

16
XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN
Format PC, Mobile, PS3, 360 **Pub** 2K Games
Dev Firaxis **Year** 2012

A huge, brilliantly conceived turn-based strategy epic whose emergent systems and brutal challenge conspire to create an endless supply of genuinely touching, sometimes frustrating, and often incredibly satisfying moments.

15
SPELUNKY
Format PC, PS4, PS3, 360, PS Vita **Pub** Mossmouth
Dev Mossmouth **Year** 2013

Derek Yu's platforming roguelike may look like it's all wide eyes and dinky little spiders, but beneath that vibrant exterior beats a dark heart fashioned from pit spikes and frost yeti fangs. Each run is a tense gauntlet, fraught with deadly cartoon peril, which makes every single success deliciously sweet.

14
SPLATOON

Format Wii U **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo EAD **Year** 2015

Nintendo's take on the multiplayer shooter is as colourful, as polished, and as heedless of convention as you'd expect, paying no mind at all to the codified world of killstreaks and perks in favour of exuberant movement and unpretentious fun in a world where kids are squids. A surprisingly fully-formed single-player rounds out this gleefully inventive package.

13
FALLOUT 4

Format PC, PS4, XO **Pub** Bethesda
Dev Bethesda **Year** 2015

The Capital Wasteland is yet another Bethesda creation that will devour vast chunks of your time, offering not only a huge open world, but also an abundance of character, atmosphere, and humour. There's a main narrative to shoot your way through, of course, but as ever it's in the diverse and inventive subquests that this sequel shines.

12
ROCKET LEAGUE
Format PS4, PC **Pub** Psyonix
Dev Psyonix **Year** 2015

Rarely is such a simple concept executed with such elegance. The physics-based football-with-cars action in this PS+ darling (coming soon to Xbox One!) took us all by surprise, but now there's few multiplayer games we'd recommend more. If you're not whooping with joy 30 seconds into your first match, we'll personally reimburse you the price of entry. [No we won't -Ed]

11
SUPER MARIO MAKER

Format Wii U **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 2015

Being handed unfettered access to the building blocks of a cultural institution can initially seem a little intimidating, but such is the accessibility and immediacy of Nintendo's digital toybox that even the most dead-eyed bean counters will be gleefully shuffling Goombas and Boos around their prototype playgrounds within a matter of minutes.

Feature

On The Cover!

10

HER STORY

Format PC, Mobile **Pub** Sam Barlow
Dev Sam Barlow **Year** 2015

An incredible excercise in non-linear storytelling, this willfully retro murder mystery uses FMV to the kind of powerful effect we'd never suspected was possible. As you comb a police database for snippets of interviews, the story that unfolds is uniquely your own. Despite minimalist mechanics and a cast of exactly one, it's a game that feels genuinely revolutionary.

9

METAL GEAR SOLID V

Format PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** Konami
Dev Kojima Productions **Year** 2015

Cinematic spectacle, dense lore, and a certain giddy strangeness have been Metal Gear Solid staples since the beginning, and they all return in this latest entry. What's surprising, however, is the self-control Kojima's shown this time, toning down his cutscene excess and impenetrable technobabble to rather more manageable levels. But that restraint has been gleefully abandoned elsewhere – there's the entirely new companion system, the surprisingly deep Mother Base rabbit hole, and of course, the introduction of lavish open-world design to the venerable series.

8

TOWERFALL ASCENSION

Formats PC, PS4, PS Vita **Pub** Matt Makes Games Inc
Dev Matt Thorson **Year** 2014

Matt Thorson's single-screen archery showdown is all about the twang of bowstrings and the bellowing of rivals; the panicked and precipitous decline from precision marksmanship to spray-and-pray mania. And such is the immediacy of this two-dimensional deathmatch that there's no intimidating on-ramp to overcome and no vertiginous learning curves to dissuade your supply of potential opponents. Archery veterans, meanwhile, will find impressive tactical depth on offer. It's been a staple of GM office lunchtimes for two years now, and not for nothing.

7

DESTINY

Format PS4, XO, PS3, 360 **Pub** Activision
Dev Bungie **Year** 2014

Bungie's now celebrated (if ominously microtransactionally distracted) sci-fi first-person MMO-esque shooter might not have set every gamer's pants aflame on the first round, but with The Taken King's improved story, loot rejig, and content dump, it came back kicking. What was never subject to harsh critique was the game's phenomenal shooting. Guns in Destiny are like nothing else, with the merest tweak of a perk rippling fervent fan debate and entire YouTube channels devoted to testing each individual weapon.

6

JOURNEY

Format PS4, PS3 **Pub** Sony
Dev Thatgamecompany **Year** 2012

If this was just one of the most attractive games ever, that might be enough, and everything in this ravishing gameworld, from your flowing cloak to the glittering sands, speaks of a singular vision. But Journey isn't just attractive; it's beautiful. Unique multiplayer mechanics pepper its simply told yet powerful pilgramage narrative with silent shared connections that feel remarkably, quietly profound. An utterly unmissable experience.

5

MARIO KART 8

Format Wii U **Pub** Nintendo
Dev Nintendo **Year** 2014

How many lunchtimes has Team GM collectively offered up to the altar of Mario Kart? Too many to count, and yet not enough to diminish our desire for one more race. The eighth entry in the series refines every aspect, from the boost jump to the drift, from the orchestral tunes, to the nostalgic course design. Sofa multiplayer has come a long way in the years since Mario Kart 7, but the plumber proves here that he's still got plenty of fuel left in the tank.

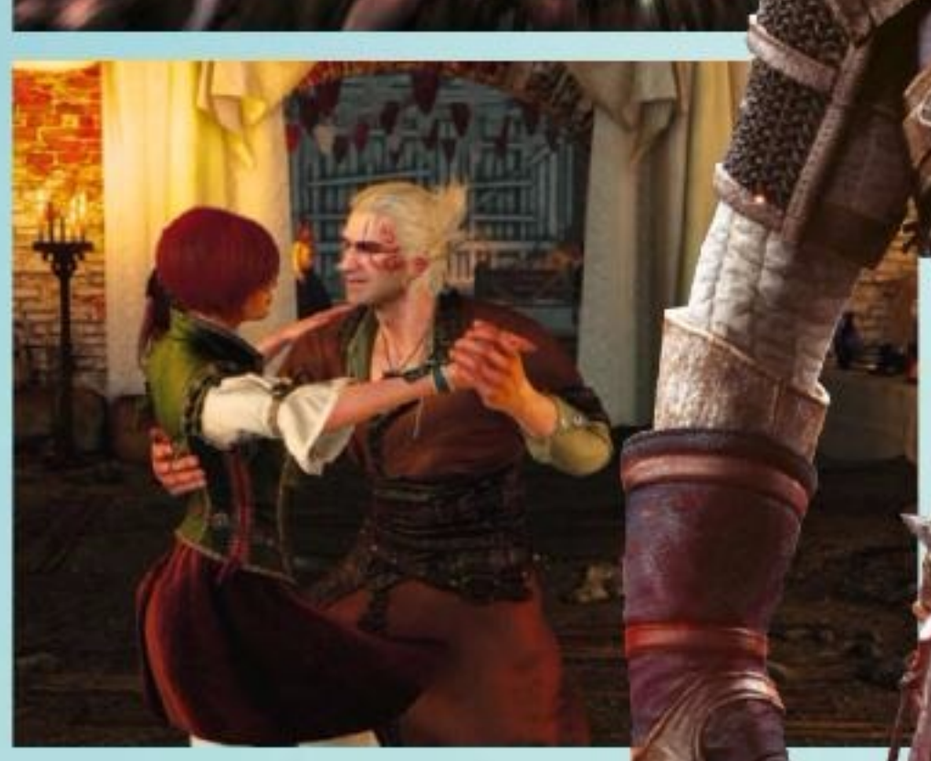
Feature
On The Cover!

4

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Rockstar
Dev Rockstar **Year** 2014

Sometimes you just want to get away from it all, and Rockstar may be the finest supplier of virtual holiday destinations going. Los Santos is its most laudable work, made up of equal parts incredulous comic-violence, believable word building and an unending ability to surprise. It was pulled together with a story some could love or hate, but there was no debating the quality, scope and pure fun to be had, each time you delved into Trevor, Franklin or Michael's seedy exploits.



3

THE WITCHER III: WILD HUNT

Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Bandai Namco
Dev CD Projekt Red **Year** 2015

To spend any time with wandering monster hunter Geralt Of Rivia in his latest adventure is to be truly transported to another land, one full of both incredible beauty and devastating ugliness. From the grandest story mission to the most seemingly insignificant sidequest, every encounter is lavished with incredible detail and depth, creating a tapestry of interwoven, believable stories that sets a new bar for the open-world genre. It's GamesMaster's Game Of The Year 2015 with good reason, and you owe it to yourself to take a journey through a Witcher's world.

2

THE LAST OF US

Format PS4, PS3 **Pub** Sony
Dev Naughty Dog **Year** 2013

When people decry the lack of good story-telling finesse in the realm of videogames, Naughty Dog is the direction in which us in the know nod our heads. This fungal apocalypse-strewn tale was the first from the Drake purveyor to fully tap into the studio's character building abilities, delivering the now legendary duo of Ellie and Joel and their epic journey across a spore-blasted US. While we're sure Drake's final fling in Uncharted 4 will be a riot, it's the promise of more achingly well put together human drama to come in the rumoured The Last Of Us 2 that has us salivating.

Feature

On The Cover!

1

DARK SOULS

Format PC, PS3, 360 Pub Namco Bandai
Dev From Software Year 2011

It takes a very special kind of game world to top those of the previous two stellar entries and, proving that atmosphere and craft are still more integral than lovely looks or fancy effects, Lordran, the landscape of celebrated creator Hidetaka Miyazaki's finest work, is just that.

Lordran interweaves within and without itself. Its collection of charred ruins, overgrown swamplands, trap-filled castles, and heavenly (?) god-demesnes flows like a fine gaming wine, a sultry array of flavours spiced with moments of hard-earned euphoria.

Beating Ornstein and Smough for the first time, and every subsequent time since. Discovering the legendary figure of Havel (or is it?) locked away in a tragic tower. Finally managing to cure yourself of a curse, a deadly health-halving affliction which everyone who plays the game comes to revile and kind-of love for its harshness. True satisfaction.

Dark Souls assumes you're smart. It gives you clues, buried in item descriptions and scattered throughout the world for those with keen eyes. We were raised on an era of games that taxed you, that enabled a rush of blood so intense it would have Batman keeling over and clutching at the banisters. This revives that legacy.

A celebration of gamers, an untouchably brilliant world, and a combat system which can only be refined, never truly bettered, ensures Dark Souls gets our pick for the absolute best game to play right now. What are you waiting for? Call us when you've beaten Gwyn!

"PROVING ATMOSPHERE AND CRAFT ARE STILL MORE INTEGRAL THAN LOVELY LOOKS OR FANCY EFFECTS"

THE NEXT

From giant ants to zombie presidents, here's how

TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR

World in conflict

Erk. If Clancy is to be believed, we're only a few months away from global catastrophe. With a nuclear attack on Saudi soil crippling the oil supply to the west – we're rather less bothered by the 6 million dead, apparently – the US and EU sign a treaty to develop a ballistic defence system, which is so good at repelling nukes we congratulate ourselves by forming an alliance that is too costly for poorer countries to join, thus allowing Russia to take them over and become a dangerous new superpower within four years. Good work, everyone!

TRAUMA CENTER: UNDER THE KNIFE

Parasitic attack

Good news: medical advances mean we can now treat previously deadly diseases such as cancer and AIDS. Bad news: acronym-loving terrorists have created a parasite called GUILT that resists all treatment. Good news again: surgeon Derek Stiles has the ability to slow down time, allowing him to not only save patients from certain death, but also defuse bombs. The world is saved! Until the sequel, at least.

DEAD RISING 3

The dead... rise

Two corrupt government officials release a parasite to trigger a zombie pandemic in California. It transpires that this a ploy by Isabela Keyes, sister of Dead Rising antagonist Carlito, designed to find a carrier immune to the disease in order to develop a cure. Bit extreme, not least as the plan also entails infecting the female president of the US, a Sarah Palin-alike who quickly develops a taste for human flesh.

2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021

EARTH DEFENSE FORCE

Bug invasion

Invading extraterrestrials go all Independence Day on us, sending giant ships to hover ominously above the world's major capitals. In the absence of Bill Pullman to unite us all with a stirring speech, we turn instead to the expendable heroes of the Earth Defense Force, who are handed ludicrously powerful weaponry to take down colossal bugs and towering robots. Blissfully unaware of the concept of collateral damage, they wreak as much devastation as the swarms of giant ants, the latter being handicapped by their alien masters forgetting to give them more than a few frames of animation.

THE WORLD ENDS!

Civilisation collapses and zombies take over in **The House of the Dead III**

PHOENIX WRIGHT ACE ATTORNEY: DUAL DESTINIES

Chaos in the courts

The beginning of a seven-year spell of corruption known as 'the dark age of the law', partly triggered by Phoenix Wright unwittingly presenting falsified evidence in court. With his career in tatters, it takes former rival Miles Edgeworth to convince Wright to retrain and eventually rebuild public faith in the legal system – albeit only after a courtroom is left in ruins by an enigmatic, symbolism-loving bomber.

WARNING SPOILER ALERT!

100 YEARS*

games think humanity's future will shape up

*ACCORDING TO VIDEOGAMES

HALF LIFE 2
Dark dystopia

Now we don't know for certain when HL2 is set, but it's sometime between 2015 and 2029. Split the difference and what do you get? Correct – Half-Life 3's probable release date. In the meantime, Valve's dystopia presents a bleak picture of the near-future: humanity's hopes for rescue from enslavement at the hands (and other appendages) of the terrifying Combine rest almost entirely on the shoulders of a nerd with glasses, a beard, and poor social skills. Hold on, is Gordon a games journalist?

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION
Augmented reality

This jaundiced vision of the future (literally; everyone looks like they're suffering from liver disease) suggests that by 2027 we're all going to be able to augment our feeble human bodies with advanced prosthetics. With anyone potentially capable of sprouting blades from their arms, it should at least cut down jostling on the Tube. Whether it's to society's benefit remains to be seen. You might think this is a game about sneaking and killing, but actually, it's about ethics in transhumanism.

SUNSET OVERDRIVE
The a-pop-alypse

A particularly busy year for Bad Stuff Happening also sees soft drinks giant FizzCo release a brand of soda that turns those who drink it into crazed, slavering monsters. A bit like Mountain Dew, then, with only marginally worse side effects. The world eventually owes its safety to a young man or woman with a worrying penchant for memes and dad jokes – the physical embodiment of 'how do you do, fellow kids?'

2022 · 2024 · 2025 · 2027

JET SET RADIO FUTURE
Art outlawed

In a world where freedom of expression is illegal, the world looks to a group of graffiti-loving punks to defy authority in the coolest way possible. It's hard to say what's more surprising: that a group with the initials GG are the heroes, or that inline skating is going to make a comeback at some point in the next decade.

THE WORLD ENDS!

Aliens invade the Earth and a flesh-eating virus ravages the population in **Crysis 2**

HOMEFRONT
Korea invades the US

America's having a pretty bad time of things. Having suffered a bird flu epidemic five years prior, this sees the beginning of an occupation at the hands of Korea, now a global force after it detonates a huge EMP over US soil that disables its ability to fight back. And how does Kaos Studios effectively represent the horrors Uncle Sam now faces? Why, by conceiving the greatest/worst QTE in living memory, inviting players to 'press X to jump in mass grave'.

Feature

On The Cover!

THE LAST OF US
Mushroom monsters

Two decades on from a rampant fungal infection – a bit like athlete's foot for your brain and internal organs – mankind's future rests on a teenage girl who swears a lot and can't swim. Still, as she can be bitten without developing a craving for carotid arteries, her survival is essential if a cure is ever to be found. Luckily, she's in the hands of a man who knows how to carry a ladder and can sniff out a wooden pallet at twenty paces. Unfortunately, he's a selfish jerk who'd condemn the world to a vaccine-free future just so he can have a replacement for his long-dead daughter. Mushrooms: 1, Humanity: 0.

HAZE
Super soldiers

Drugs are bad, kids. That's particularly true by the middle of the next century, as the powerful Mantel Corporation introduces a new super hallucinogen known as Nectar, designed to make soldiers run faster, jump further, and shoot better. It also induces a kind of reverse Sixth Sense effect, in that you don't see dead people: those you've killed will suddenly disappear from view, though that's a fairly familiar feature of Ubisoft games. There are, of course, side effects – namely, severe mental degradation, death, and really disappointing sales figures.

CALL OF DUTY: ADVANCED WARFARE
PMC panic

After falling from favour – presumably owing to numerous incidents of accidental elbow blade-related eviscerations on public transport – biotechnology is back in fashion. So too are private military contractors, one of which, Atlas, is run by the in-no-way-sociopathic Jonathan Irons (face of Kevin Spacey, eyes of Michael Myers) who definitely isn't engineering conflicts for his company's own gain. Despite being tragically Skywalkered in Act One, one-armed bandit Jack Mitchell saves the day – though Atlas itself lives on.

2033

METRO 2033
Nuclear winter

Hey, if you think it's bad in America, spare a thought for our Russian comrades, driven underground by atomic war and forced to eke out a miserable existence in Moscow's railway tunnels while being stalked by horrifying mutants with the ability to cause violent hallucinations. Just when you think things can't get any grimmer, it turns out these so-called Dark Ones were trying to communicate a message of peace, and that it might have been a mistake to set off the salvo of missiles that just blasted them off the face of the planet. Er... oopsie?

2048

WIPEOUT 2048
Hover racing

Football? Boring. The Premier League might be enjoying its most fascinatingly unpredictable season in years, but that'll all be forgotten when the sport of anti-gravity racing starts to take off in 30 years or so. That said, its organisers might well have been mainlining Nectar when they decided that its events should take place in major cities, rather than the bespoke venues that would be built in years to come. Still: handy way to get around the congestion charge, even if beginner pilots tend to spend most of their time crashing explosively into walls.

2054

2070

ANNO 2070
The world floods

Anno? Oh no, more like. Global warming has finally caused the polar ice caps to give up the ghost, leaving the world's biggest cities a tad wetter than usual (except Redditch, for which this level of water is perfectly normal). With the lowlands now enjoying a view previously reserved exclusively for residents of Rapture, it's naturally time to plant our flag in the highlands, sailing between the remaining archipelagos in seaborne Arks. Hey, it could be worse – all that green, blue, and pristine white future tech makes for an unusually attractive post-apocalypse.

WARNING SPOILER ALERT!

BINARY DOMAIN
Androids everywhere

Manufacturers making robots designed to look like humans are doing their job a bit too well, so a new mandate dictates that they should probably stop that. Except one unhinged genius has gone a step further, creating bots that don't just look human, they don't actually know they're not. Until they're shot in the face and forced to look in the mirror, at least. Still, amid the (understandable) shrieking technophobia, someone saw fit to build a French android with a penchant for neckties who offers ego-boosting congratulations for even the most minor feats. Ooh la la!

SYNDICATE
Cyber subjugation

Drugs are still bad, kids – though, admittedly, they're quite useful if, say, you're a corporation preparing to deploy a series of trenchcoat-wearing cyborgs to eliminate your rivals. Or, for that matter, if you're hoping to fake a utopian vision to a public that would otherwise be screaming in terror because there's a bunch of blokes with flamethrowers walking menacingly down the street in their direction. Aside from the power to brainwash the populace in a manner not seen since Simon Cowell, if 2096 is remarkable for anything, it's that shotguns will sound more kick-ass than ever before. The future's bright; the future's *boom*! Chk-chk.

KILLZONE
Space Nazis set out

Earth is – surprise! – running out of resources, and as such we're off to other planets to nick theirs. Sadly, a particularly disastrous mission sees no fewer than six colony ships fall completely off the radar, and we haven't got enough money spare for another try. Subsequently, the Helghan Corporation submits a successful bid for settlement rights in Alpha Centauri, and, as luck would have it, the company already has a fleet of its own. Surely nothing can go wrong from striking such a favourable deal? Oh, wait...

2077 — 2080 — 2084 — 2096 — 2099 — 2101 — 2116

THE WORLD ENDS!

A nuclear holocaust devastates the planet in **Fallout**

ROBOTRON
Robot rampage

Eugene Jarvis' 1982 shooter is rightly renowned as an arcade classic, but its premise is as bleak as they come. Thanks to the titular robots, almost everyone on Earth is dead, and it's up to a hero with no name to protect the last remaining human family from extinction by shooting ever larger and more dangerous waves of bots.

SPIDER-MAN: SHATTERED DIMENSIONS
Web-swinging

The end of the 21st century witnesses a new Spidey don that iconic red and blue suit – which now comes in a striking new design. The web-crawling hero must work with other parallel universe versions of himself to piece together the fragments of a mystical artefact before a catastrophic event is unleashed upon the world. What could it be? Perhaps it's Marvel trying to reboot the Amazing series yet again, this time starring Tobey Maguire's great-grandson, Tugboat Jr.

THE WORLD ENDS!

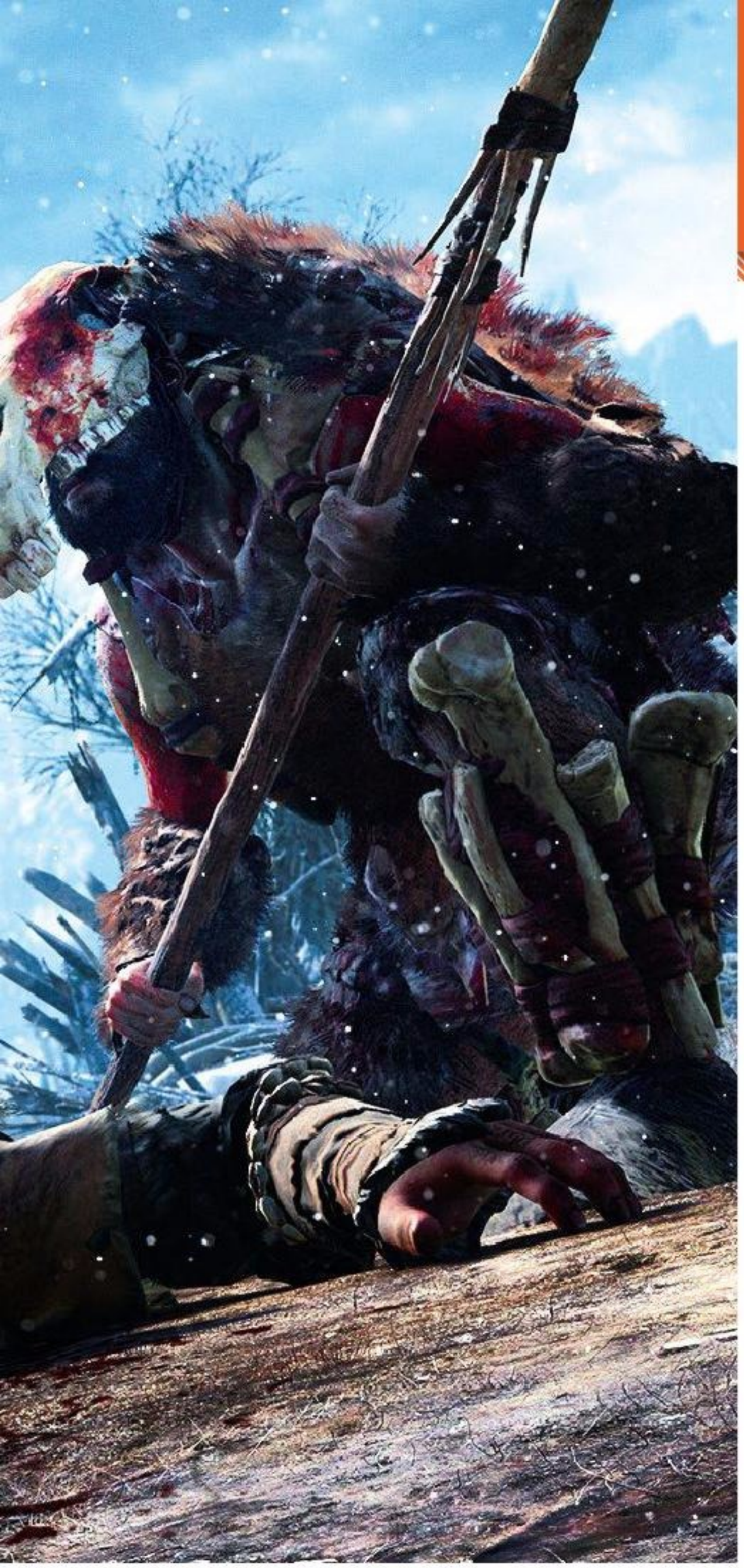
A grammar-defying evil declares war on humanity's bases, leaving us no chance to survive, in **Zero Wing**

Spears have a really brutal heft to them. Take one in the chest and you won't live to tell the tale.

"IN THE ABSENCE OF GUNS, ANIMALS ACT LIKE BIG, FURRY BULLETS"

Drinking a pint of delicious blood out of an animal skull? Great to see such a culturally sensitive and nuanced depiction of tribal life.

The downside to building your camp out of wood is that you're just one spark away from homelessness – and smoke alarms won't be a thing for another 12,000 years.



Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft Montreal ETA 23 February

FAR CRY PRIMAL

Bestial spin-off reinvents the wheel in 10,000 BC

Ubisoft's open-world FPS series has long traded on virtual tourism, inviting us to gawp at exotic vistas before sending half the animal population up to safari heaven. Primal has the same gawp factor – it's set in Oros, a vast valley that ranges from craggy mountains to dense forest – but it also offers a temporal jaunt, whisking us back 12,000 years to the Mesolithic period. In an almost Assassin's Creed-y twist, it's about immersing yourself in a new culture, specifically one where there're no guns to bring down the beasts of the world. You're right at the bottom of the food chain. Deal with it.

Taking Far Cry back to 10,000BC is the perfect opportunity to hit the reset button on a series that risked stagnating. Travelling to a period before guns, dictators, and radio towers forces designers to reject the template established across Far Cry 3 and 4, while simultaneously evolving those ideas that are a better fit for the period: the focus on man's relationship with nature (specifically how nature's guts can be turned into trendy duds), for example, or the dynamic flame physics of Ubi's in-house Dunia game engine. Fire was pretty cutting edge back then, after all.

Fur real

In the absence of guns, animals act like big, furry bullets. Sure, they still exist to incite random chaos – the game's director is killed by a passing bear before he can finish his introductory demo – but you can also tame them and command them to chew on rival tribesmen. Good sense dictates that silent arrows to the head is a wiser means of clearing enemy camps, but sending a saber-toothed tiger to nosh on a caveman's throat is more fun to watch. Even more so when the beast in question decides to violently urinate on his fallen enemy. That is some top animal kingdom disrespect.

It's also marks Primal out as quite a silly game, far from the down 'n' dirty caveman simulator some might have hoped for. Animals are won over with a

Set in an age before iron sights were even invented, holding the left trigger aims your finger for giving commands to your animal companions.

Don't forget to show your loyal furry friends some love. Just make sure you've cleaned the meat scent off your hands first, yeah?

Best of the beasts

Say hello to your food chain friends

Oh deer

Technically it's an elk, but *you* try writing an elk pun. Herbivores sit at the bottom of the food chain – you can't tame them for combat purposes, but they can be fashioned into some helpful upgrades.

Unbearable

Chubby little cubby all stuffed with fluff? Sadly not. The cave bear has no appetite for fluff, preferring a slice of succulent caveperson. At least his monstrous size makes him an easy spearing target.

Fangtastic

The saber-toothed tiger is all bite and no bark. Bag one of these toothy beauts and you can ride him into battle, like a jeep that eats people. You've just got to hope the jeep doesn't get a taste for its driver...

Tusk, tusk

Let's address the literal elephant in the room: yes, you will be contributing to mammoth extinction. It's self-defence, we reckon – rile these giants up and they'll stampede you into paste.

single handful of meat and a quick pat on the head, which is pure nonsense to anyone who has ever tried to get affection out of a cat. Once recruited, animals can be dismissed to join a zoo of sidekicks that you can recall into the field at any given time. The concept of weighing up the strategic advantages of a bear versus a honey badger feels more like a Monty Python sketch than a serious action game.

Owl aboard

The height of silliness, quite literally, is your tactical owl. Given that binoculars won't be invented for another 11,600 years, you instead perform reconnaissance by blowing a birdcall and mentally inhabiting your feathered friend. Not only does it mark enemies on the map, but with a little bit of upgrading can dive beak-first into enemies, or drop beehives and bombs on saps below. A quick Wikipedia search shows no evidence that cavemen used owls to drop bees on other cavemen, but who are we to criticise it when the act itself is such a hoot. (Pardon the pun.)

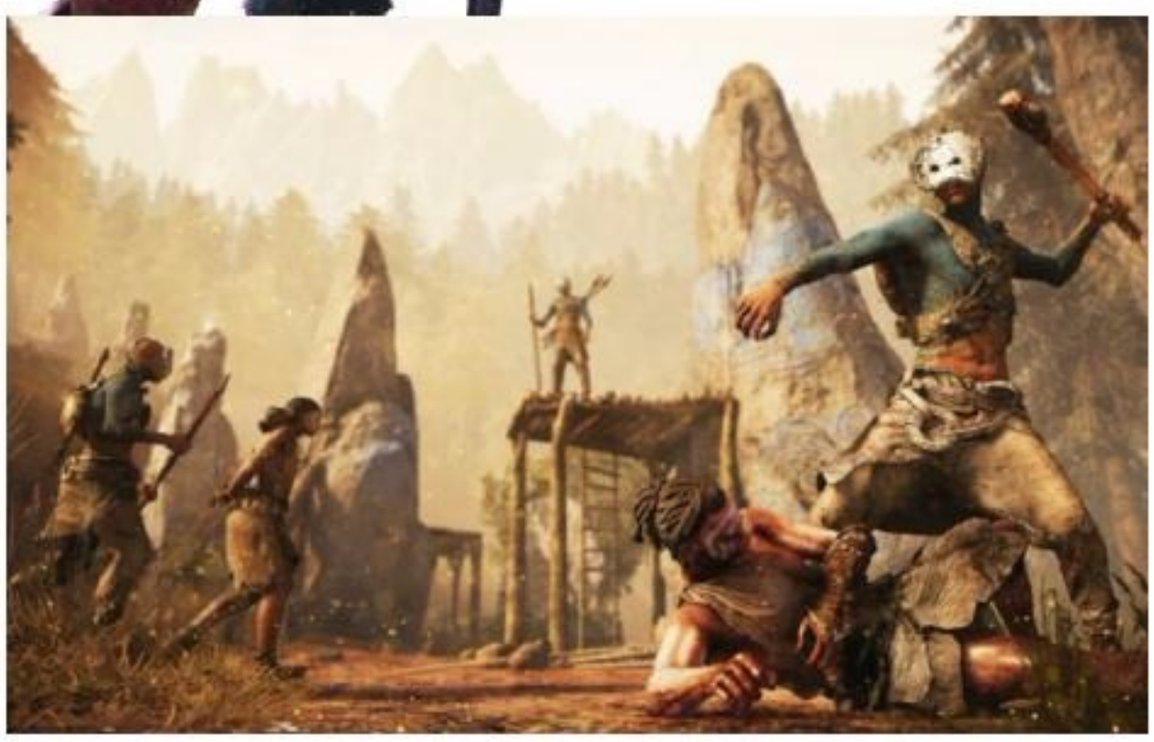
Stomaching a little silliness in the pursuit of excitement is the general thrust of Far Cry Primal. Does it matter, for example, that the game gives you a preposterous prehistoric grappling hook, when said rope lets you scale cliffs to slit the throats of gormless guards? Likewise, the ability to magically light arrows, spears, and clubs on fire is never explained, but the power to pen enemies in with burning shrubs is too useful to get huffy about. Where Ubisoft's organically spreading fire always felt like a neat trick in search of tactical purpose, here it's a vital tool for destabilising more built-up, well-guarded encampments.

"BEING A MESOLITHIC WARRIOR SHOULD FEEL DIFFERENT TO PLAYING AN OBNOXIOUS GAP-YEAR STUDENT IN 2008"

Where Primal does falter is in its familiarity. For all their modern trappings, Far Cry 3 and 4 both embraced primitive skills, whether in item crafting or the focus on acrobatic close quarters stealth. Shifting to a culture where those ideas are a necessity doesn't solve the problem that we've done both many times before. Indeed, dipping into the menus and seeing a shopping list of animal parts, or a skill tree full of returning moves, can't help but feel like recycling. Being a Mesolithic warrior should feel different to playing an obnoxious gap-year student in 2008. Worryingly, it doesn't.

This isn't helped by the fact that the general shape of the game remains the same: yet another exercise in sniffing out collectibles in caves, taking on bounties, hunting rare animals, and seizing outposts by killing everyone in the camp

There's no denying the Dunia engine still cooks up some gorgeous sights. The lighting transforms the common forest into a fantasy land.



Crouch into stealth mode and your animal companion will slink to the ground, preparing for a double-pronged assault. Looks silly when it's a giant bear.

You'll often happen upon fellow tribesmen. Some are in captivity and need rescuing, others are found merrily going about their hunter-gathering.

Arrows need to be crafted from gathered wood, so it's worth investing in skills that multiply the number produced. Don't want to run out.

and lighting their bonfire. By making the tasks so similar to those in previous games you can't help but compare them, and in doing so you begin to feel the absence of 21st century mod cons – meaty guns, explosives, helicopters. A wolf, no matter how vicious he is, is no replacement for these colourful tools.

Spear factor

That said, there is plenty of the game we don't get to see in our hands-on session. Menus hint at some kind of base camp management, suggesting that we'll build up a tribal empire over time. Likewise, the developers assure us there'll be a harder survival edge, whether it's preparing in the day for vicious predator attacks at night, or having to source fire or thicker clothing to survive the harsh colds of higher altitudes. It's this fragility that should mark the period out from its modern counterparts; something we can't wait to try out in the final game.

And it's also hard to stay cross at a game that gives you a bomb-chucking attack owl, or lets you thump giant throwing spears into rampaging honey badgers, or explains that woolly mammoths went extinct because one maniac caveman ran around setting them on fire. This isn't quite the step away from its comfort zone that Ubisoft would have us believe, but hey, with a zone this comfortable, who can blame them? ■ ***Matthew Castle***

GM Instant Reaction

+ Commanding your personal honey badger feels like worthy compensation for being terrorised by them in Far Cry 4.

– Heavily recycled mechanics and missions mean it's more of a historical re-skin of Far Cry 3 and 4 than a standalone game.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Feels a tad prehistoric, and not always in the way it intends.

Particularly muscular warriors can absorb multiple arrows before dropping. Thunk a shaft in their soft head to take them down faster.

Dragunov's back (Russian around as usual). His Rage Art is preceded by a kind of pensive chin-stroking. Gives us chills.

Fighting games are all about drama: sick combos, unbelievable comebacks, the inevitable humbling. Katsuhiro Harada's latest is certainly under pressure to put on a show for fans old and new. But 'stage fright' isn't in the vocabulary of a series with 20 years experience, and its new entry is pure theatre.

Tekken's always had a flair for the downright bananas. Robotic fairies with chainsaw arms! Busty tree-people! Characters lobbing relatives into volcanoes! Its history reads like a series of aborted Monty Python skits dropped for being too surreal. Tekken 7, however, is a kind of *fresh* madness. It has all the close quarters tactility of previous titles, but glossy Unreal Engine 4 graphics are wrapped around some seriously dynamic changes.

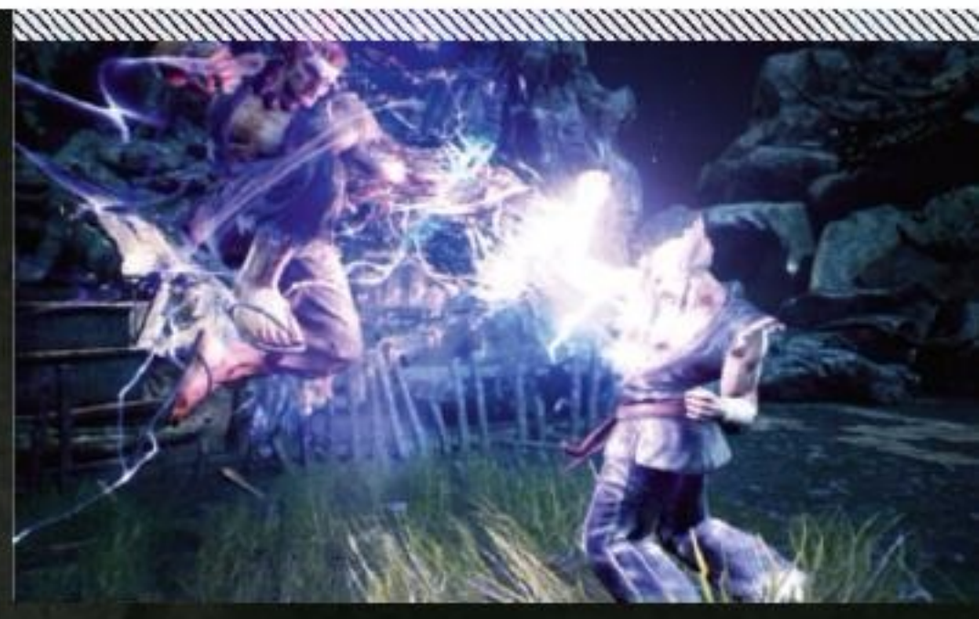
It's instantly accessible, the merest flash of fingers over the four buttons now enough to unleash hard-hitting moves and handy preset combos. Damage has been upped significantly (even newbies can get vets sweating with basic mix-ups) and matches are blazing-fast and furious, orange sparks flying until a zoom-in, slo-mo, killer blow K.O. fills the screen with butt-kickery.

Spar mechanic

It's Tekken 7's goal to entertain both players and spectators. Visual design manager Kosuke Waki explains: "It's kind of hard to see at times why people are so excited about [the game], if you don't know Tekken well. They're just doing low kicks or punching or whatever, it's not like a Shoryuken or anything! So we've added these new features, and even the graphical representation, so that it's more fun for people to watch – the Rage Arts especially."

Tekken 7's new, aptly-named super moves, Rage Arts can be triggered once your health has been pounded down to Critical

"ORANGE SPARKS FLY UNTIL A ZOOM-IN, SLO-MO, KILLER BLOW K.O. FILLS THE SCREEN WITH BUTT-KICKERY"



Format PS4 Publisher Bandai Namco Developer Bandai Namco ETA Autumn 2016

TEKKEN 7

We're Power Crushing on this gorgeous new instalment

Tekken 7's sparks are undeniably jazzy, but just wait until you see Akuma's lightning. And see it you will – the Street Fighter star is console-bound.

70% complete

Town, a last chance to inflict massive damage on your opponent. A simple input suffices to pull off flashy, potentially match-winning cutscene takedowns; the mechanic feels like the love-child of Street Fighter V's V-Trigger and a showboatload of steroids. Terrifying when we're on the receiving end. At least blocking or side-stepping puts paid to our nemeses' nonsense.

The new Power Crush parrying system also draws us a crowd. Activating it briefly interrupts an incoming combo to let us shoulder-charge back unhindered. We're reminded of Tekken Revolution's invincible moves – but a quick glance at our health bar reveals we're still absorbing their mid- and high-level attacks. It balances fights: an opportunity to deal damage when on the back foot, although ultimately a risky move.

Match momentum flies back and forth... until our challenger hits their Rage Art right after ours, which takes the wind out of our impossibly-coiffed hair a bit. We voice our concerns about Tekken 7's ease of use to senior designer Michael Murray. "Yeah, it's more accessible – but it's not abusable, I don't think," he muses. "There's still that strategy that if you're trying to blatantly do the Rage Art, your opponent's going to read it anyway."

Kawaii so serious

The new mechanics are made for such mind-games. So, too, are some of the new characters. Kicking an enemy downstairs through Jungle Outpost's breakable balcony whilst squealing "lucky!" is jerk-tastic. That's the battle-cry of catgirl Lucky Chloe, whose fluffy fanservice look disguises a fluid and highly technical fighter – master her dance transitions and you're away.

Middle Eastern mix-up mogul Shaheen is more beginner-friendly. We dominate by adopting a strategy we call the 'Lil Jon': get low and throw some killer punches. Don't even get us started on mama Mishima: new boss Kazumi's uppercut comes with pirouetting tiger in tow. It's all very Siegfried and Roy.

But the more we play, the clearer it becomes that Tekken 7 is not just for show. Faster and fairer than ever, it'll be a real workhorse of a fighter if handled properly. Nevertheless, with new graphics and new mechanics spawning Oscar-worthy moments, we'll happily ham it up as stars of the small screen when it drops. ■ ***Jen Simpkins***

GM Instant Reaction

+ No Hadoukening away from your responsibilities! Tekken 7 has the fighting spirit of previous iterations, with added Rage Arts.

– It's certainly easier to bust out lethal combos. Great for new players, but the focus on accessibility could affect depth.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Who must we sacrifice to the volcano to get it immediately?

No, it isn't Tom Clancy's The Division – it's the Twilight Conflict stage, complete with breakable floor, balcony, and a Mishima Pizza van. What better backdrop for some truly apocalyptic bouts?

GM Reviews

The Final Verdict!

78 Dirt Rally

What makes this rally racer the "Dark Souls of driving simulators"? Read on to find out...

HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system in the same genre at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...

GM GOLD

Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.

Format PS4, PC **Publisher** Thekla Inc
Developer Thekla Inc **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

THE WITNESS

Get ready to draw the line

We really hope you like maze puzzles. Not 'fond of', or 'dig them a bit,' but more on the level of '*oh my golly maze puzzles!!!*'. Because that is, for the largest part, what The Witness is. A seemingly endless collection of mazes on little screens: draw a line from start to finish and you're done. Except you're not, really, because often the mazes appear in clusters and groups anywhere up to eight at a time, and nearly always reward you with more mazes. Mazes, mazes, mazes. If you feel like the word is starting to lose all meaning already, try playing a game where it's all you do for hours at a time.

Now, you might think this is an exaggeration, that there must be something else. While the forms may change in unexpected ways, solving mazes is most definitely the task at hand. Style, rules, and other twists add variety – you might have to separate dots or pair colours with the lines you draw, or look to the environment for clues – but ultimately the end result is the same: draw a little line and repeat the process.

Here's an example: early on in the game you find a door that can be opened by, you guessed it, a maze puzzle. But the puzzle itself is locked. Opening it requires you to solve a bank of five mazes. They in turn activate a set of six more and, when they've been solved, those then switch on another seven. Only then, when you've solved all 18, can you... solve the one locking the door. Get through all that and you'll find another six mazes to finish, and finally trigger a mysterious device that fires a beam of light at a strange box at the top of a mountain.

Give it Everest

That peak is the driving force behind the game, which takes place on a small island. You emerge into this setting via a tunnel, with no fanfare, welcome, or support. From there it's up to you to make your own way through the world, piecing together what you can and solving maze after maze after maze. The setting is split up into several distinct locations, all with different themes. There's a desert area with a temple, a couple of forests, one with tree houses strung in the canopies, a castle, a small town, and so on. Somewhere in each of these areas is a large yellow box containing the strange laser beam devices that, when finally activated, shine a light towards that large central mountain. Atop this location is a box with seven clasps, each one unlocked by completing an area and activating its machine. Opening this container is the

GM CERTIFIED 100% INDEPENDENT REVIEWS SINCE 1993

"YOU EMERGE INTO THIS SETTING VIA A TUNNEL, WITH NO FANFARE, WELCOME, OR SUPPORT"

How long did Leon spend on FaceTime one evening with a friend trying to tag-team one section? Two hours.

The Mancubus could do with getting a little more exercise – he's easy to outrun. The scorching walls of flame he shoots? Less so.

GM MOST WANTED

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Bethesda Softworks **Developer** Id Software **ETA** Summer 2016

DOOM

Id blasts a bloody, double-barrelled hole through the modern shooter

This isn't how it usually goes. We've found ourselves embroiled in an exchange of fire with another player, an aggressor who saw us first and landed the opening shot. It's been a full five seconds and neither of us is dead – instead, we ducked behind a pillar, then double-bluffed and popped out on the same side to launch a rocket at their feet. Our foe lets off a rifle shot that just grazes us, before we end the encounter with a thudding Super Shotgun blast.

Doom feels nothing like Call Of Duty. It shouldn't, of course, but it's still a shock to realise that victory here doesn't depend on who has the hip-firing accuracy perk, penchant for headshots, and good luck to spot a target first. In Doom's multiplayer, encounters descend into desperate tooth-and-nail (well, plasma-and-buckshot) duels to the death, meaningful battles amid the wider war. It turns out fighting off marines in Hell is rather more satisfying that engaging an army of merciless 13 year olds.

Hell played

And in Doom, cowards... erm, we mean *strategists* can even attempt to retreat to lick their wounds (which involves collecting health pick-ups – there's no recharging vitality here), which ensures the game's multiplayer conflicts feel deep, tactically nuanced, and astonishingly violent. The fast pace, chunky aesthetic, and smattering of jump pads evoke more than a whiff of Id Software's other biggy, Quake, too, but the overall feel is that this game owes significantly more to the first two in the series than to the off-piste (and under-appreciated) Doom 3.

This refocusing is obvious in the single-player game, too. Where the last game traded on creeping horror, shadowy corners, and long stretches of tension-building atmospherics, the earlier games were built on continual movement and a 'shoot first, shoot again later' approach to enemy clearance. This latest iteration subscribes to that thinking, and playing it feels like riding a bloody, thunderous rollercoaster as a result. Id Software executive producer Marty Stratton describes the feeling they want to give players as like being "Bruce Lee on a skateboard with a shotgun".

75% complete

Perhaps it's more like being Keanu Reeves on a chainsaw bus, however: if you slow down while playing Doom, you're dead. Imps clamber up walls while Barons leap from lower platforms to cut you off. Revenants send rapid bursts of missiles towards you. And armoured pink Demons charge at you while you try to avoid the rest and find a gap in which to return fire. It's overwhelming, exhilarating

Once you're tired of bashing angel-ladies in instances, you can head back to the newly-returned hub city of Dalaran.

Format PC **Developer** Blizzard
Publisher Blizzard **ETA** Summer

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: LEGION

The ageing MMO masterwork crusades ever on

Very quickly upon arriving in The Broken Isles – Legion's big set of new landscapes to explore – we realise something. For the first time in a long while, perhaps since Cataclysm, Warcraft feels comfortable with itself. There are no outwardly superficial additions (read: pandas/Garrisons/ pseudo-Pokémon battles) to reel in new players. Instead we're straight back into the hunt for overhead punctuation and sweet, sweet loot.

The most immediate fun to be had is with the new Demon Hunter class. Besides rocking dual glaives so big you could surf on them, these double-jumping elven melee fighters have a skill set geared, much like the Monk's, towards battlefield traversal. You can advance with a swipe of your glaives, sucking up distance like a satisfyingly long noodle each time. And they have skills that set them up for some great – and even after a decade, unique – party mechanics, too. Spectral Sight lets you see through walls, useful for alerting your mates when an enemy is waiting just around a corner, and Eye Beam ensures that a Demon Hunter can deal out spikes of hurt when necessary, something that can't be said for all classes.

70% complete

Life glaivings

Existing classes also see some seismic changes. Hunter specialisations are being completely reworked, with Survival now focusing on melee builds, and Marksman forgoing pets entirely. Artifact Weapons (Blizzard's spelling) also come into play, letting veterans capable of earning them upgrade their arms as they progress.

Ultimately, this is not shaping up to be a Deathwing-sized injection of world-changing refurbishments. Instead Legion is offering a gregarious fine-tuning of what remains one of the best MMOs going. ■ ***Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman***

GM Instant Reaction

+ There's plenty for existing players to sink their teeth into, and the new Demon Hunter class is a riot to experiment with.

– If the idea of class tweaks and yet more raids and dungeons to plumb didn't do it for you before, then keep walking.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Veterans will welcome this far more direct expansion.

Demon Hunters start out at level 98, and have a unique goopy green starting area set years prior to the events of the main story.

Final Fantasy VII is a reference point for Remake's updated character models, but the assets are all new.

Format PS4 **Publisher** Square Enix
Developer Square Enix **ETA** Summer 2017

FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

A new lease of Strife

Everyone's favourite spiky-haired swordsman is back, with a higher polygon count and skinnier arms than ever before. However, Cloud Strife's malnourished pythons aren't the only divisive changes on the table for this anticipated remake: Square Enix has announced that its JRPG classic will be distributed as a "multi-part series", suggesting the publisher plans to break the game into episodic chunks.

But there are encouraging signs too, for those who care to look. For instance, Square veteran Tetsuya Nomura, the man who designed Cloud Strife and invented the Limit Break, has been confirmed as the project's director. Meanwhile, Yoshinori Kitase and Kazushige Nojima, who co-wrote the script of Final Fantasy VII, are attached as producer and scenario writer respectively.

There's a lot of senior talent from the original game on board, then, but that's not to say they'll be slavishly adhering to their original designs. Nomura recently told our boisterous buddies over at Official PlayStation Magazine that there are going to be "dramatic changes" to the game. "We're not going to be changing it into a shooter or something like that," though, he reassured: "we want to make sure it's recognisable."

Action stations

It's clear, though, that the beloved battle system has been heavily revamped, eschewing turn-based tactics for something closer to the flashy real-time combat system created for Final Fantasy XV. Limit Breaks and the ATB Gauge will return, but in a redesigned form to match this more action-oriented gameplay.

And while the finished package will contain a wealth of additional material not seen in the original Final Fantasy VII, Nomura has confirmed that certain existing sections will be cut if they don't stand the test of time.

Fans of a certain scene can breathe a sigh of relief, though. Remake's director has separately confirmed that the infamous Cloud cross-dressing scene will be recreated in the new engine, so prepare for arrestingly hi-res images of Cloud in a dress. ■ ***James Nouch***

20% complete

GM Instant Reaction

+ Relive your childhood in glorious HD while pondering how Cloud's puny arms can lift that buster sword.

– Nobody was crying out for an episodic release schedule. Let's hope Square Enix is sensible about carving it up.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

The remake fans wanted, but will Square make the right changes?

GM MOST WANTED

Format PC Publisher 2K Games Developer Firaxis ETA 5 February

XCOM 2

Out of the frying pan, into the fire

This isn't a war. The war ended 20 years ago, when humanity's last courageous defenders were crushed by the ruthless alien invaders. This is an uprising – a desperate insurgency against the now entrenched inhuman occupation. And who else to lead it but you, commander? Vive la révolution!

Yep, canonically we all lost our XCOM: Enemy Unknown runs, and we'll be picking up the pieces in this sequel. It's an unusual move, but according to senior producer Garth DeAngelis, it's all about maintaining the series' magic – while still keeping it feeling fresh.

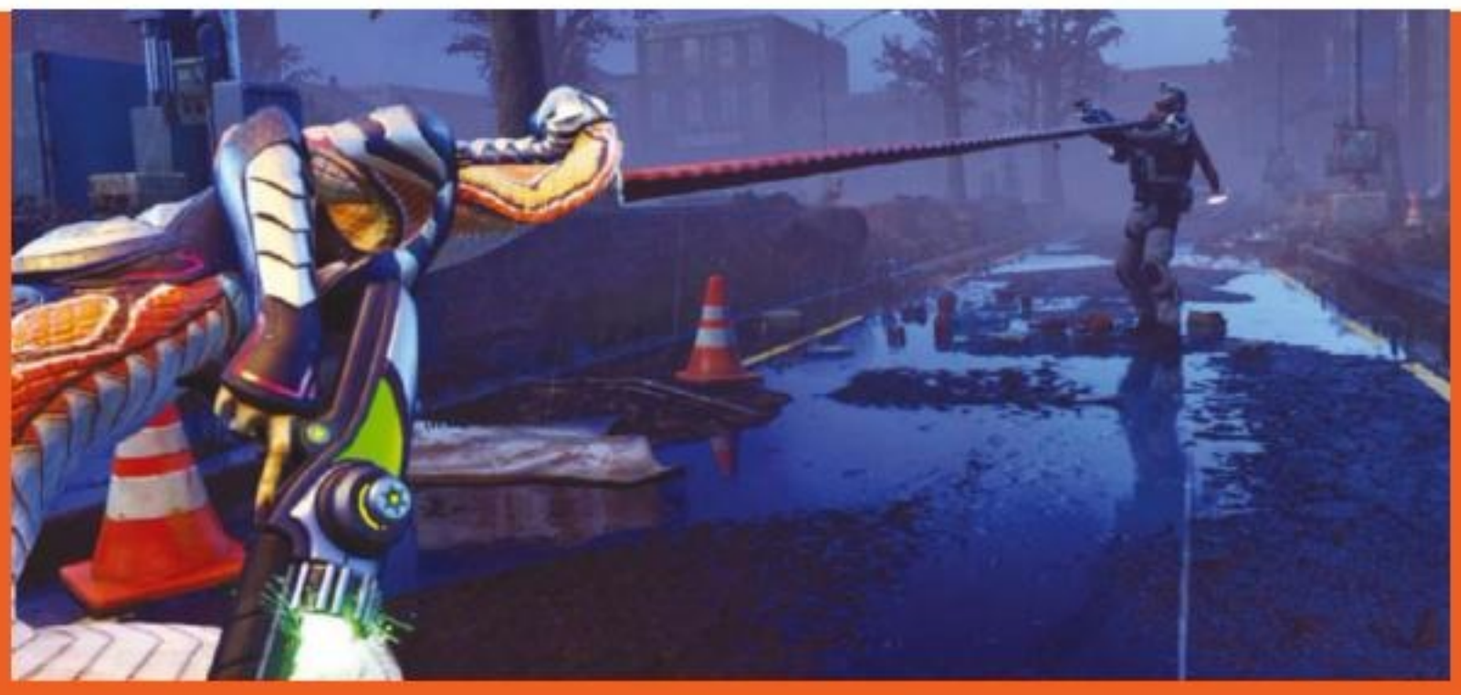
"We all beat [the first game], we had that feeling of triumph, we had that feeling of overcoming it, but we thought it was far more interesting – when you look at what [the series] is about; consequences and overcoming odds – we thought it was far more interesting to have a premise where you're even way more behind the eight ball," he explains. "It allowed us to set up mechanically a world where you have to rebuild your technology, you're completely scattered, and you don't have the support of any of the nations. It's this really captivating world that feeds into those themes of loss and overcoming odds, which is what XCOM is all about."

"YOU HAVE TO REBUILD YOUR TECH, YOU'RE SCATTERED, AND YOU'VE GOT NO SUPPORT"

ADVENT rising

In those two decades of victory, your foes certainly haven't been twiddling their thumbs, either. While your team's resorting to scavenging, jury-rigging, and recruiting all comers to survive, the enemy's stronger than ever, with whole new breeds of soldier under their command. From the deceptively human ADVENT troopers (warped faces under their helmets betray the alien's genetic tampering) to the constricting, snake-like Vipers, to now seriously upgraded Sectoids (able to raise the dead, no less), there's more terrifying variety to the forces arrayed against you than ever.

Succeed at a hack attempt on an enemy robot, and they'll fall under your control. Fail, and they'll receive a deadly buff.



XCOM: Enemy Unknown's Heavy has been replaced by the grenade launcher-toting Grenadier.

"We don't – and I'm really proud of this – have a game where there is a fixed enemy language,' says Garth. "It's not like 'alright, our enemies are all in black because they're from this one single planet'. No, XCOM is all about a menagerie of aliens, and that plays into this feeling, when you're playing long term, that you don't quite know what you're going to see next."

Globetrotter

That unpredictability is core to the game's new strategy layer too. No longer a simple system of satellites and fixed events, you'll now spend your time between missions exploring the globe, and fighting a desperate tug-of-war.

"The strategy layer is so open ended and unpredictable – it makes the game truly feel better the more you get into it, because there're so many vectors to be able to win this game, so many strategies to take," Garth enthuses. "In EU, the strategy route was more of a fixed road, the golden path was a little more identified. And we still have a golden path, but it's far more open ended. There're so many choices you can make on the geoscape now that make it feel like this vast, open world."

Combine that with the new Concealment system and timed objectives, mechanics that encourage faster and more aggressive play than ever before, and you've got a sequel that feels both starkly new and wonderfully familiar. ■ ***Robin Valentine***

GM Instant Reaction

+ Defending the Earth feels fresher, less predictable, and more replayable than ever. A brilliant shake-up of the formula.

+ At the same time, it's staying completely true to the tone and feel of Enemy Unknown – as well as its rock-hard difficulty.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Another modern turn-based strategy classic in the making.

The E.X.O. Suit boosts a soldier's health, and includes a built in heavy weapon. Initially that means a wrist-mounted rocket launcher, but more can be researched as you go.

The spacemen cometh

Intergalactic rotters out to ruin your day

Andromedons

Shadowy aliens housed in hulking battle suits, these meldings of meat and machine can destroy cover and humans with equal ease, and, as a cheeky bonus, fire corrosive acid grenades.

The Faceless

One moment, a seemingly helpless civilian bystander. The next, a towering, melty monstrosity. Now that the aliens have mastered shapeshifting, no one can be trusted. Just what XCOM needed.

Archons

The unthinkable has happened: the aliens have gotten into PR. The first game's Floaters have been given a new look to make them less horrifying to the general population – though no less deadly, of course.

Chryssalids

They're back, and worse than ever. Their bites now turn victims into cocoons which, if not destroyed, will spawn *three* more adult Chryssalids. Oh, and they can tunnel through the earth, too.

Mutons have only gone and stuck bayonets on the ends of their plasma rifles. Try to melee them with your Rangers and they'll automatically counter-attack.

Future

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DARK SOULS III

STREET FIGHTER V

→ www.pcgamer.com/weekender

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The leader of the Valkyrie is voiced by Battlestar Galactica's Katee Sackhoff in the game's Recall mode.

There are three different classes of spaceship on offer, with the fighter, heavy, and support crafts all handling noticeably differently.

CCP is including Valkyrie as a freebie for all Oculus Rift preorders.

GM Instant Reaction

+ A great fit for VR headsets, letting you sit and enjoy the game. Locking onto enemies by physically turning feels natural.

– CCP's last EVE spinoff, Dust 514, was a ponderous piece of pap – colour us cautious about this latest spin-off as a result.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

A bracing bit of space-based shooting for early adopters of VR.

There are currently no plans to connect the game with EVE: Online, as Dust 514 memorably attempted, but Willans doesn't rule it out for the future.

Format PS4, PC **Publisher** CCP Games
Developer CCP Games **ETA** Spring 2016

EVE: VALKYRIE

Dogfight of the valkyries

Virtual reality, for all of the industry hype that surrounds it, is still something of an unknown quantity, and it remains to be seen whether players will strap on injection-moulded goggles in their droves. But by now it's abundantly clear that the technology has already got plenty of developers all fired up.

That's especially true of Andrew Willans, the lead designer of multiplayer VR dogfighting spin-off EVE: Valkyrie. "The arrival of consumer VR is the most significant event to happen in the games industry since Mario swapped his 2D dungarees for 3D in 1996," he enthuses. "Technological innovations and improvements have given us a constantly expanding palette to create from, but until now this has largely been presented on a 2D screen."

For Willans, it's this leap from flat, static display to immersive, head-tracking techno-wizardry that makes VR such a compelling prospect – and one that's particularly well-suited to space-based ship-to-ship combat. Making full use of your expanded field of vision is vital as you pilot the nippy fighters, while missile lock-ons are guided by a head-tracked targeting system.

EVE us alone

Those PvP battles are supplemented by a suite of single-player modes – including a lore-filled training mission and wave-based survival stages – but it's clear that multiplayer aerial bust-ups are the focus for CCP, with a ranking system and ship-tinkering options available to keep players occupied. The existing EVE fanbase will find a very different pace of play, of course, but Willans is bullish that his team will be able to balance the demands of new and old players alike.

"We're expanding the EVE universe to a whole new range of players," he says, "and hopefully delivering something that the existing fanbase will be proud to be a part of." ■ ***James Nouch***

85% complete

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Devolver Digital
Developer Flying Wild Hog **ETA** Winter

SHADOW WARRIOR 2

More Wang for your buck

Remember the days when you could carry seven types of assault rifle and a rocket launcher? Remember when it was enemy numbers rather than AI that provided a sense of challenge? Remember... health packs? Polish developer Flying Wild Hog does.

The studio's 2013 retro reimagining of Shadow Warrior was a lovable bit of idiosyncrasy, gleefully rejecting a decade's worth of accumulated shooter convention in favour of the FPS mechanics of a bygone age. We quizzed Shadow Warrior 2 writer Slawomir Uliasz on the thinking behind this decision, and his response is unequivocal. "The gameplay decisions for Shadow Warrior were purely dictated by fun," he says.

"The old-school mechanics found in games like Doom, Serious Sam and the original Shadow Warrior balance hectic gameplay and enemy management by giving you an absolutely ridiculous amount of firepower. Modern shooters have innovated in many ways, but we felt we needed to go for the urgent immediacy of the original wave of FPS games," Slawomir continues. "Cover creates camping. Stop-and-pop breaks up the action. Hide-and-heal feels like you're running away. We wanted a pure, uncut, balls-out action vibe."

Four player co-op multiplayer promises guffaws aplenty.

70% complete

Ninja rule

The question, then, is where do you go from there? If Shadow Warrior represents pure 'balls-out' action, surely a sequel has to bring something new to the table beyond the promise of additional balls. It's a question the team has considered, implementing a variety of structural and technological improvements for this second outing, ensuring that environments are more open and attractive across the board. The gameplay solution, however, was to double down on the madness by exaggerating the sense of speed and freedom of movement even further, enabling you to perform wire-fu leaps across rooftops and effortlessly airdash across gaps.

It all leaves the swordplay looking more stylishly silly than ever, as Lo Wang dodges, dashes, and jumps around his demonic foes, tossing out schlocky innuendoes like a samurai Duke Nukem. You could certainly call Shadow Warrior 2 dated, but it's willfully so, the result of a team bucking industry trends in favour of happy anachronism. Or, as Uliasz puts it: "Flying Wild Hog is proud to reject progress and wave the flag of awesome stupid fun." ■ ***James Nouch***

GM Instant Reaction

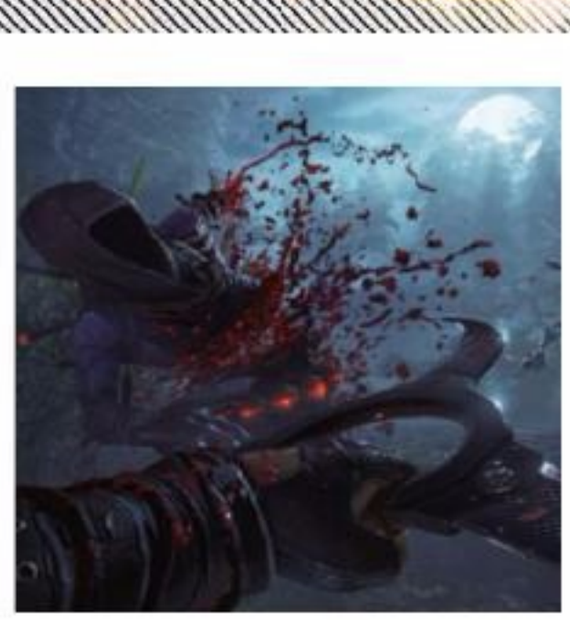
+ Preserves all the joyful anachronisms of its predecessor while offering greater depth and more fluid movement.

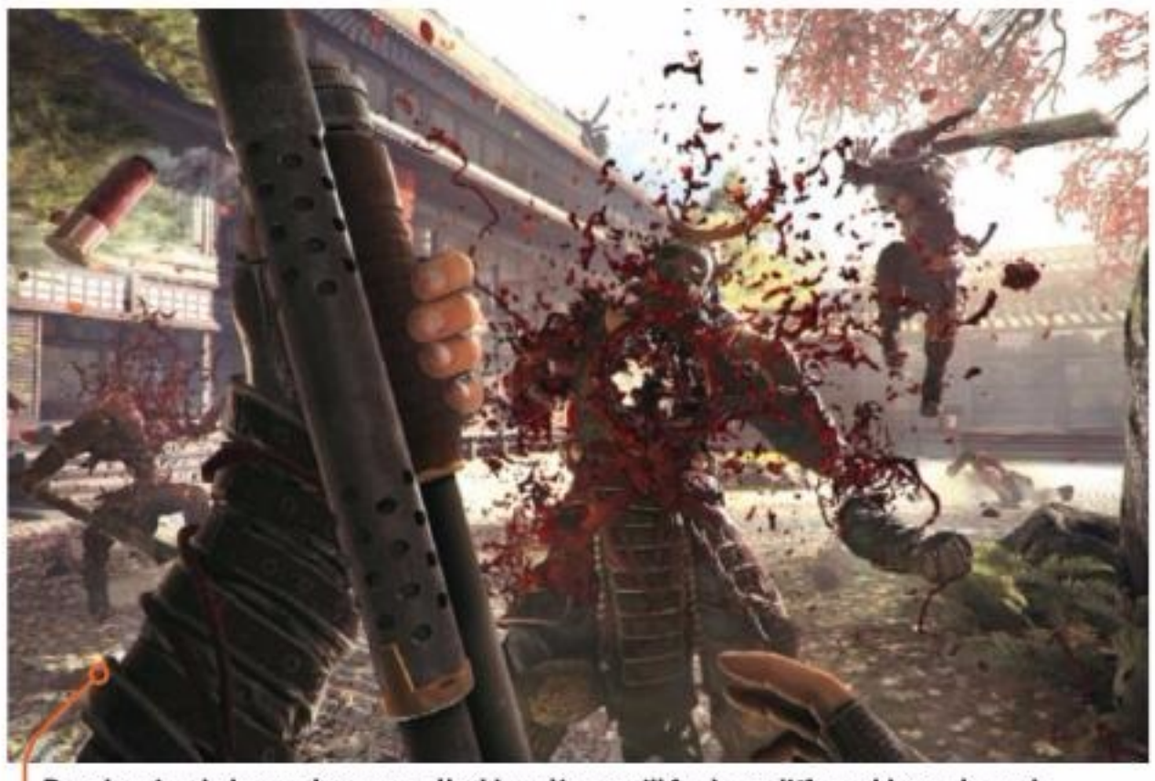
– Shadow Warrior was lovably dumb, but the mucky gags and penile punnery might wear thin a second time around.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Swords, silliness, and sordid jokes in a gleefully outdated package.




Randomised elements ensure that locations will feature different layouts and enemies should you care to revisit them.

The developer has implemented its own procedural cutting system to ensure plenty of variety when you're slicing up demons with your katana.

Format PS4, XO, PC Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft ETA Summer

SOUTH PARK: THE FRACTURED BUT WHOLE

The whole truth

The Stick Of Truth? "That was barely even an RPG, Kyle! The combat sucked. We're going to do it bigger, and we will settle for nothing less than a 9.5 on Gamespot." Although Cartman's not a fan, the last game's turn-based scraps return in this free-roam adventure that sees the boys play superhero.

Cartman, dressed as the Wolverine-clawed Coon, leads his backyard Avengers against Butters' Professor Chaos. There's Kenny as the immortal Mysterion, Kyle as the flying Human Kite, and Stan as Toolshed, who mentally controls power tools. The disparity between fantasy and reality is rinsed for gags: Token's alter-ego is a cyborg, but he's actually just wearing tupperware, and Mint-Berry Crunch literally throws cereal. We're grinning already. ■

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
Another hilarious RPG in the making.

Access modes and features through the Backyard Battleground hub, and join the endless plants/zombies war.

Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher EA Developer PopCap ETA 23 February

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE 2

A riotous display, but not worth wetting your plants over

Senior gameplay designer Chris Fox is amazed. "Honestly, I've never seen anything that clutch, even within the dev team," he tells us. He's describing the play during Gnome Bomb mode, in which two teams of five compete to hijack an explosive, where someone manages to score despite being turned into a goat.

This class-based shooter spin-off of the popular mobile tower defence multiplies such manic moments by up to 24 players in new territorial-control-ish gametype Herbal Assault. Trouble is, they're random outcomes emerging from chaos.

With spandex-wearing Super Brainz whirlwind-kicking things, Imps flinging stasis grenades, and a time-travelling bounty-hunting orange rolling around in a citrusy ball, clashes are haywire, and weapon feedback feels buried under the weight of all the characters and powers – firing energy beams at a cactus is a fun spectacle, but not entirely satisfying.

It's more expansive, though, now playable both offline and splitscreen. Wave-based Garden Ops, in which you team with three friends or bots, is joined by a Graveyard Ops spin where you control the zombies. With 12 maps featuring low-gravity lunar bases and fantasy theme parks, six new characters (army veteran Kernel Corn is an instant favourite) and plenty of customisables (we like Scientist Zombie's lightbulb pigtails), Garden Warfare 2's bigger than its predecessor, but also sometimes a confusing pain in the botany. ■

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
Agricultural chaos aplenty.

Format PS4, XO, PC Pub 2k Games
Dev Hangar 13 ETA Summer

MAFIA 3

Vietnam veteran Lincoln Clay means business in this crime caper set in '68. In recent footage he scares info from a snout by stealing his car and driving like a maniac, then parks up and infiltrates a jazz club to ice drug-peddling mobsters. The largely loading-screen-free sandbox packs plenty of pursuits, from purging gang hideouts to dividing up your turf. Seamlessly blending cover-shooting, wheel-screeching, squad-building strategy and sightseeing set to a banging soundtrack, Mafia 3's relocation to New Orleans looks a smart move. ■

Format PS4, XO, PC Pub Square Enix
Dev IO Interactive ETA 11 March

HITMAN

Good news for PS4 players: you're getting six exclusive contracts in which Agent 47 travels the world to take out former members of a brutal paramilitary unit called CICADA – and no, we don't mean take out to dinner. Good news for everyone else: Hitman is Hitman again, with broad levels set across France, Italy, Morocco, Thailand, Japan, and America, all rife with unique kills. Ahead of a March release, try February's free beta, set 20 years back, in which our icy assassin enters the icier ICA training facility and meets long-time handler Diana. ■

Format PS4 Pub Sony
Dev Naughty Dog ETA 26 April

UNCHARTED 4

Ever the optimists, we're choosing to look on the bright side of Naughty Dog shifting its cinematic actioner to April. With bigger, more reactive environments facilitating new combat moves (such as swinging off ropes and landing on people like an angry Tarzan), increasingly ludicrous setpieces (including a jeep chase through a very destructible shanty town), 60-fps multiplayer, and, in a series first, campaign dialogue options, a few more months in the oven should ensure that Uncharted 4 is PS4's biggest exclusive bun (or 'game') of 2016. ■

Format PS4, XO, PC Pub Bandai Namco
Dev From Software ETA 12 April

DARK SOULS III

Spring-loaded stake launchers, 5ft flip razors, and a great ruddy wheel formed Bloodborne's melee-focussed arsenal, but From Software's other bastard-hard horror RPG heaves with tactically diverse combat: bows are back in number, magic packs a punch, you have a new spinning attack, and a flimsy wooden board is not your only shield option. It's a slower and more cautious experience, somewhere between Dark Souls II and Bloodborne in pace, but with more incentive to try out different character builds. Oh, and you're going to die a lot. Yay! ■ ***Ben Griffin***

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Ways to interact with other dogs include wrestling and play but also knowing when to run if things get nasty.

Format PS4, PC **Developer** Kevin Cancienne **ETA** November **Web** http://bit.ly/gmhomefree

#1 HOME FREE

Play by the drools in this dog simulator

If the combo of MGS V's D-Dog and Fallout 4's goggle-wearing Dogmeat have left you dribbling for more canine goodness, then look no further than this Kickstarter project.

Funded in only five days, Home Free is a four legged success story that comes from one man from New York who wanted to know what would happen if you let a dog roam freely in a procedurally generated world. It turns out that a lot of people wanted to know too and backed the (wagging?) tale of man's best friend left to its own devices.

But why dogs? "I've been a game design nerd for a long time. I've loved watching dogs play for even longer," explains creator Kevin Cancienne. "As a game designer, I find the dynamics of dog play really fascinating. Without the benefit of spoken language, they seem to negotiate and even adjudicate games with each other: you chase me, now I'll chase you; now let's do tug-of-war for a while, then I'm going to pretend to pull off your ear. Healthy dog play is super interesting and inspiring to me."

Bark survival evolved

Cancienne had been working on a four-player local multiplayer game called Dog Park that will now come bundled with Home Free. At risk of sounding like a well known mobile company's advertising, he just wants us to, well, be more dog. "Dogs seem to play not to win or lose, but to produce more play; play itself is the goal," he says. "For Dog Park, I wanted to see if I could get humans to do some canine roleplay and nudge them into experiencing some of those dog play dynamics."

In the emotive trailer for Home Free, our canine hero is abandoned by its owner. When it realises its two-legged friend isn't coming back, it heads out to explore and find out what it takes to live alone in a big city without Bonios on tap. The world is filled with threats, but also plenty of edible rubbish and potential new doggy friends. Plus, what to do is entirely up to you.

"I'm really interested in the way that procedural game worlds can intensify and make real a sense of exploration. There's something about wandering around a place that you know no-one has ever seen before that's just really magical," Cancienne says. "My first experiences playing Minecraft years ago really made that clear to me, and clearly upcoming games like No Man's Sky depend on that quite a bit. I think guaranteeing that each player's game is unique will really drive home that sense of bewildering solitude."

"DOGS SEEM TO HAVE AN ALMOST SUPERNATURAL OPTIMISM. I WANT PLAYERS TO FEEL THIS TOO"

Who is...

Kevin Cancienne is an indie dev based in New York City who has been in the industry for 15 years. He co-developed the Half Life Science And Industry mod, and spent five years as senior vice president of NY studio Area Code. Prior to Home Free he developed canine multiplayer game Dog Park.

As you explore, you'll discover that parts of the city can offer up some tasty treats if you know when restaurants put out their bins at night.

The full city is at your paw tips, and it's up to you where you go. This looks like a perfect 'everything the light touches' moment. We can't help but wonder how a dog managed to get up to the top of that building, though...

Of course it has to start with a human leaving a pup all on its lonesome. It's all very tear-jerking, but just remember that Homeward Bound did have a happy ending.

Plus, in order to survive, we'll need to learn how the environments can work in our furry favour. "A lot of the experience of the game is learning the particular rhythms of your city," Cancienne confirms. "What's the best part of the town to hang out in at sundown to find some promising, unattended garbage bins? Where can you sleep safe and warm at night?"

Thankfully too, humans aren't all as bad as they appear in the trailer, but Cancienne is mysterious on the subject of the owner. "I'm not entirely sure the owner is as despicable as he seems," he says. "In the trailer you never find out why he didn't come back. Maybe something terrible happened to him, or he was just temporarily delayed? You're a dog and it's hard to understand these things. But there will be kindly humans in the game who will reward you with bits of their lunch for a trick, or offer reassuring pats on the head. Even there, though, I'm interested in trying to offer that experience through a scared creature's eyes."

Don't worry, though, it isn't too cruel. Cancienne is well aware of the stressful implications that come with the topic. "I was drawn to this concept because I love dogs, and I have no desire to play, let alone create, some kind of dog suffering simulator," he says. "I'll definitely be taking some liberties and softening some of the brutal realities that would face a real dog in a situation like this. While the game is about a dog in a pretty desperate situation, I want to instill the experience with a certain sense of hope. Dogs seem to have an almost supernatural sense of optimism. As they progress through the game, I want players to feel this too."

There will be a number of ways to have a happily-ever-after for your precious pooch but Cancienne isn't giving too much away.

Ruff day

The art style is bright and beautifully simple but what's most striking is the chirpy electro guitar soundtrack from Mark Robinson. "I really wanted something that didn't sound like typical videogame music," Cancienne explains. "Nothing 'epic.' Nothing 'videogamey.' Since you're playing as a dog, this isn't going to be a game with a bunch of voice acting or dialogue. A soundtrack that serves as a kind of emotional counterweight to the wordless situations on screen is really important."

If you're already charmed, then here's the kicker: there's plenty of inspiration from Cancienne's own pet. "The first dog I added to the game, and the dog who plays the hero in the trailer, is based pretty closely on my dog Princess," he enthuses. "When I sat down to create my first 3D dog and then animate it, it just made sense to base it on the dog that was lying down right next to me. She's a beautiful little pitbull mix I adopted eight years ago." D'awww. Just like that, we can't wait to see more. Surely this deserves canine out of ten...? ■

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

Try this!

You'll need to sniff it out on the PS3 Store, but Tokyo Jungle is a unique roguelike that sees you starting out as a lowly Pomeranian dog in a post-apocalyptic city.

The 60 Second Pitch

In the dog house with Kevin Cancienne

You are a dog, lost in a sprawling and unfamiliar city. You wander the streets, searching for scraps, for shelter, for a friendly face. Slowly, you overcome some of your fears. You learn where you can snag a meaty bone, where you can sleep warm and safe at night. Strange streets become familiar territory, one by one. You find friends. Eventually, maybe, home. Home Free is an open-world action-RPG starring a dog lost in a sprawling, randomly generated city. Use your canine abilities to explore this strange, sometimes hostile environment, and find your place in the world. Shape the story of one dog's survival through your choices and actions. Experience the world from the perspective of a creature who will never quite understand why that world acts the way it does. I've been working on Home Free for about two years. It's the culmination of a lot of work and a bunch of crazy interests: procedural content, urbanism, quadrupedal locomotion, and dogs – how they play, the stories we tell about them, and what makes them tick.

IndieMaster

The Best Of The Indie Scene!

Format PS4, PC Developer House House ETA March Web http://bit.ly/gmpushme

#2 PUSH ME PULL YOU

Get yourself in a twist

Sometimes it's hard to convey how a game makes you *feel*. Happy or sad just don't seem to cover the great swathe of emotions that overcome us when we watch footage of this unique couch co-op 'wrestling' game. We put that in quotes because wrestlers aren't normally connected like a snake made of two torsos, crawling around with only their arms and trying to gain control of a ball. What? Yes. *Exactly*.

This is the first game from the team and we'd say it's off to a good, if rather disturbing, start. Who knows what it'll come up with next...

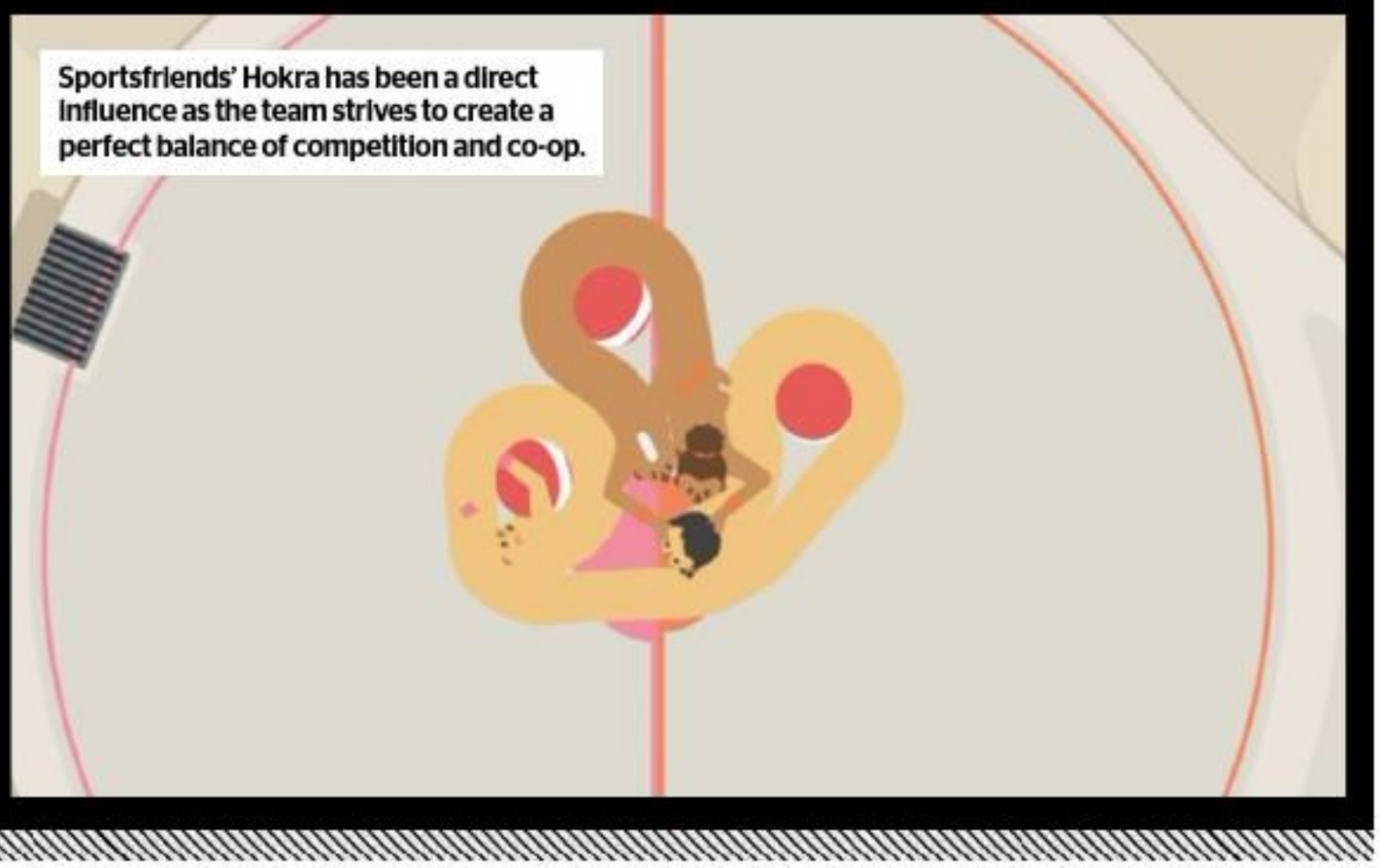
"The idea for connected bodies came when we were workshopping a bunch of different mechanics for a hypothetical 2v2 multiplayer game," says game designer Michael McMaster. "One of the ideas was for both players to be tethered together somehow, and we thought that was a rich enough idea to prototype on its own. We were also enormous fans of the game Noby Noby Boy, and loved the idea of transplanting the charming weirdness of that into a competitive local-multiplayer setting."

Somehow, Push Me Pull You has a strange attraction that just can't be explained. Especially when you can hear naked bodies squeezing against one another as they wrap around a ball to stop the other wrestlers from seizing it.

"With the game's scariness/grossness – we've never really specifically aimed to cultivate that," says McMaster. "Obviously, at its core, it's a game about weird bodies, but we didn't want the entire game to reflect that. Our attitude in developing the game's world and theme has been to take it as a given that this is what people look like, and then keep our setting fairly humble and mundane. I guess a side-effect of this is that we're now constantly forgetting that we've made something gross, so it's always a bit of a surprise to see people's immediate revulsion when they encounter the game for the first time."

Next of skin

Thankfully it's not just the grossness that's attractive here. The team has made a unique co-op experience where, although it can be controlled by separate controllers, you can also team up and take an analogue stick each. "We're really glad we've been able to let players share a single controller," McMaster enthuses. "It was originally just intended as a means of letting people without four controllers play the game but a really great side-effect of sharing is that it's kind of an embodiment of the fact that players are connected on-screen as well. As you're wrestling with or against your partner in game, you're also subconsciously wrestling over the controller itself." One to watch. And potentially have nightmares about. ■



Sportsfriends' Hokra has been a direct influence as the team strives to create a perfect balance of competition and co-op.

Small... But Perfectly Formed

The ultimate bedroom-crafted blockbusters

MANIC MINER

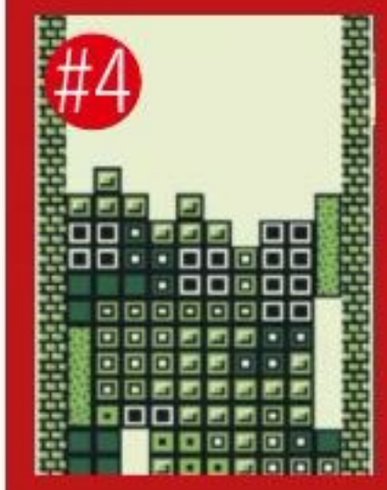
Written in just eight weeks for the ZX Spectrum in 1983 by 17-year-old Matt Smith (who went on to make Jet Set Willy), Manic Miner is one of the earliest platformers. It sees you as a miner hurtling through various treacherous caverns, collecting items before your oxygen runs out. Stressful.

FLAPPY BIRD

Scoff if you like. Flappy Bird has defined a generation of screen-tapping games. So popular was it in 2013 that Vietnamese developer Dong Nguyen, feeling guilty about its addictive nature, removed it from the App Store. Developed in only a few days, it was at one point earning $50,000 a day from in-app ads.

MINECRAFT

The literal blockbuster that this list couldn't exist without, this global phenomenon was all started by Markus Persson in his spare time while he was working for Candy Crush devs King. He was originally inspired by block-based sandbox game Infiniminer, the devs of which must be kicking themselves.



TETRIS

Ok, Alexey Pajitnov didn't make Tetris in his bedroom, but he did single-handedly make the legendary block turner while testing hardware in the USSR in 1984. The Soviet government had the rights, so he didn't make a penny until the 1990s, when he moved to the US. Yes, *this* is why a movie is coming.

BRAID

This beautiful time-turning thinkathon was developed over three years by Jonathan Blow. It's said he put $200,000 of his own money into it. His only help was hiring artist David Hellman, but even before that, it had won a design award at the 2006 Independent Games Festival. He was always on to a winner. ■

www.twitter.com/gamesmaster

Format PC **Developer** LKA.it **ETA** March **Web** http://bit.ly/gmtownoflight

#3 THE TOWN OF LIGHT

Mental health and safety

Asylum? Check. Creepy porcelain dolls? Affirmative. Creaking, slowly spinning wheels of abandoned overturned wheelchairs? Well, yes. It may sound like a bag of tired terror staples, but this Italian psychological horror game aims for far more than just casual frights. The development team has intensively researched mental illness and wants the first-person experience to shine a light on the dark past of depression and psychological trauma.

You are behind the eyes of Renèe, a woman returning to the asylum where she was brought as a teenager. As you explore, gradually uncovering her patient notes and reliving her memories, you discover her disturbing experiences within the walls. Sounds depressing? It is. It recreates an actual asylum in Volterra that was one of the largest in Europe with more than 5,000 inmates.

This isn't Outlast. From what we played, it's an atmospheric, disturbing recreation of the trauma created by the misunderstanding of mental illness. Reading patient notes (based on the real thing) while wandering the dilapidated hospital is an uncomfortable experience. Renèe's memories are played in animated comic-style sequences, but are no less stressful for it.

Ill will

Gentle exploration is key, but the section we played saw Renèe finding her old doll and having to place it in a wheelchair to continue. This jars, as it reminds you you're playing a game at heart. Power boxes need to be switched on to activate lifts and some of the gameplay feels disjointed from its clearly difficult subject matter. We also had to hit H for a clue of where to go next on a number of occasions.

Yet the atmosphere is intense and oppressive, and we gazed out of the windows and wished to just go back out in the sunshine. If this feeling can override some of the horror clichés then this could be something far more interesting than its creepy doll-packed screenshots suggest. ■

Oculus Rift support allows you to fully immerse yourself in deeply psychological horror. We're... not sure we're going to be able to handle it.

Format PC **Developer** KeokeN Interactive **ETA** Summer **Web** http://bit.ly/gmdelivermoon

#4 DELIVER US THE MOON

Working in Apollo-ing conditions

The last time someone told us we were the only chance humanity had for survival, we had to sit in a dark room and have a glass of water with the stress of it all. And now it's happening *again*, but this time we need to leave Earth to get it done. Oh great. What was it about space and screaming again?

Set in 2069, Deliver Us The Moon sees a lone astronaut sent spaceward to attempt to save mankind, who have foolishly let all Earth's resources dry up. The game's built in the ultra glossy Unreal Engine 4 and can be played in both first and third-person, and it's looking lovely so far. The footage we've seen is beautiful and lonely as the astronaut explores abandoned bases on the moon, accompanied only by the floating Destiny Ghost-like ASE (All Seeing Eye).

Rocket, man

It's not all taking in the crisply atmospheric sights, though. There're puzzles to solve with your power tool, an oxygen supply to juggle and, later in the game, a jetpack so you can glide around pretending you haven't seen what happens in Gravity. Add in native Oculus Rift support for the full space stress experience and this one looks like a bit of a – ahem – star attraction. ■

"GLIDE AROUND THE SKIES AND PRETEND YOU HAVEN'T SEEN WHAT HAPPENS IN GRAVITY"

The jetpack won't be your only means of getting around – there's also going to be lunar vehicles in which to chug across the dusty surface of the moon.

MinecraftMaster

The Most Block-busting Builds!

HOW TO... BUILD A SUGARCANE AUTO-FARM

Sit back, take a load off, and let your crops harvest themselves

This handy contraption is not only a great introduction to redstone engineering, but to automatic farming as well. Tending crops provides you with plenty of valuable materials, but requires an awful lot of upkeep, so a device like this is great for letting you concentrate on the more important things in life.

1 Place a row of eight sand and a row of eight wood parallel to each other, with an empty row in between. Place a filler block between the two rows and use your bucket to fill the middle channel with water.

2 Build a two block high wall behind the row of sand, then climb up onto the row of sand. Layer eight pistons along the top of your wall, followed by a second layer of eight pistons again. You should be left with a four block high wall, topped with pistons. These little marvels of Minecraft engineering will work as your farming implements, responsible for chopping down your sugarcane when it hits the right length.

3 Behind your newly formed piston wall, build yourself another line of blocks three spaces from the ground. This row should be directly behind the pistons. Now run another line of blocks eight across two blocks above the one you just built. If you've done it right, there should be a one block gap between the two, and the upper piston row's back should be exposed.

4 At the open end of your water channel, leave the three end blocks empty and place a wooden block at each side. Burrow four blocks down in the empty three spaces, and at the top, set a tripwire across the opening of the channel. You're nearly ready to wire this whole area up. As redstone doesn't tell you when you've done anything wrong, make sure your build looks exactly like the photo, no matter how tempted you may be to add your own artistic touches.

5 Put a piece of redstone dust on top of the wooden block holding the tripwire on the piston side of your channel, then go one block out and one up. Place another wooden block with a redstone torch on top. Then another wooden block, then another redstone torch. Then another wooden block after that. On the backwards facing side of the first and third wooden blocks, place redstone torches – they'll be diagonally above the shelves.

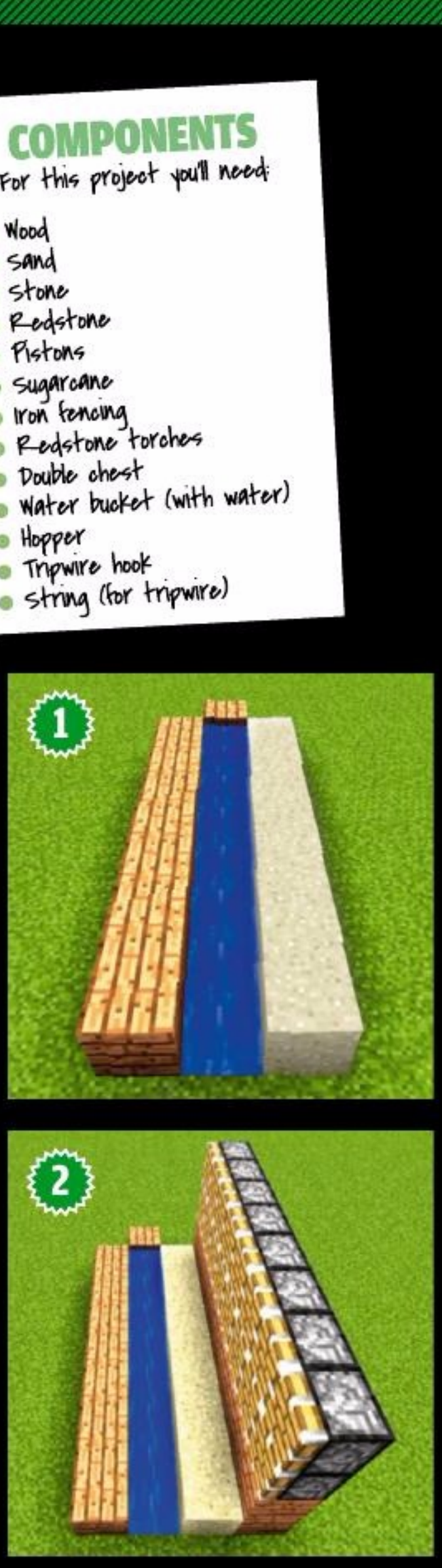
6 Extend those shelves that you made earlier by one in the direction of the torches (see image five for an example of the shelving), then cover the bottom shelf in redstone dust, and on the top shelf place a repeater. Set the repeater to the fourth position before filling the rest of the shelf with even more redstone dust. You can go ahead and plant your sugarcane now too – just place a single one of each in each of the sand blocks, and take a moment to mentally prepare yourself to become Minecraft's ultimate sugar baron.

7 We're nearly there! Just a few finishing touches to go. Now above your water channel, build an iron fence directly in front of the places where the sugarcane will grow. This is to stop the pistons from pushing the sugarcane out of the machine or over the water channel to a soggy death. The last step is to hop into the bottom of the hole at the end of the channel. Place your chest there, leave one space above the chest empty so it will open, and place the hopper above it at the end of the water stream. That's it – project complete!

COMPONENTS

For this project you'll need:

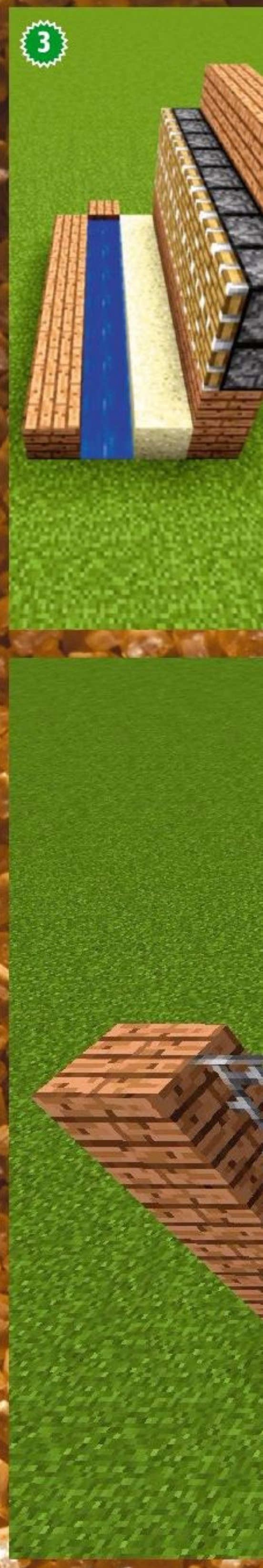
- Wood
- Sand
- Stone
- Redstone
- Pistons
- Sugarcane
- Iron fencing
- Redstone torches
- Double chest
- Water bucket (with water)
- Hopper
- Tripwire hook
- String (for tripwire)



How it works

As your sugarcane grows, it will trigger the pistons to push out and break it, causing it to fall into the water channel. When it hits the water channel it'll flow to the end and trigger the tripwire that you strung across the stream earlier, which will retract the pistons. Then it will fall via the hopper into your chest for you to collect later on.

Because sugarcane will always grow to three blocks tall as long as there's the space to do so, it won't require replanting to grow, and the pistons will trigger again and again as soon as it hits its full height. Voilà – magic farming!



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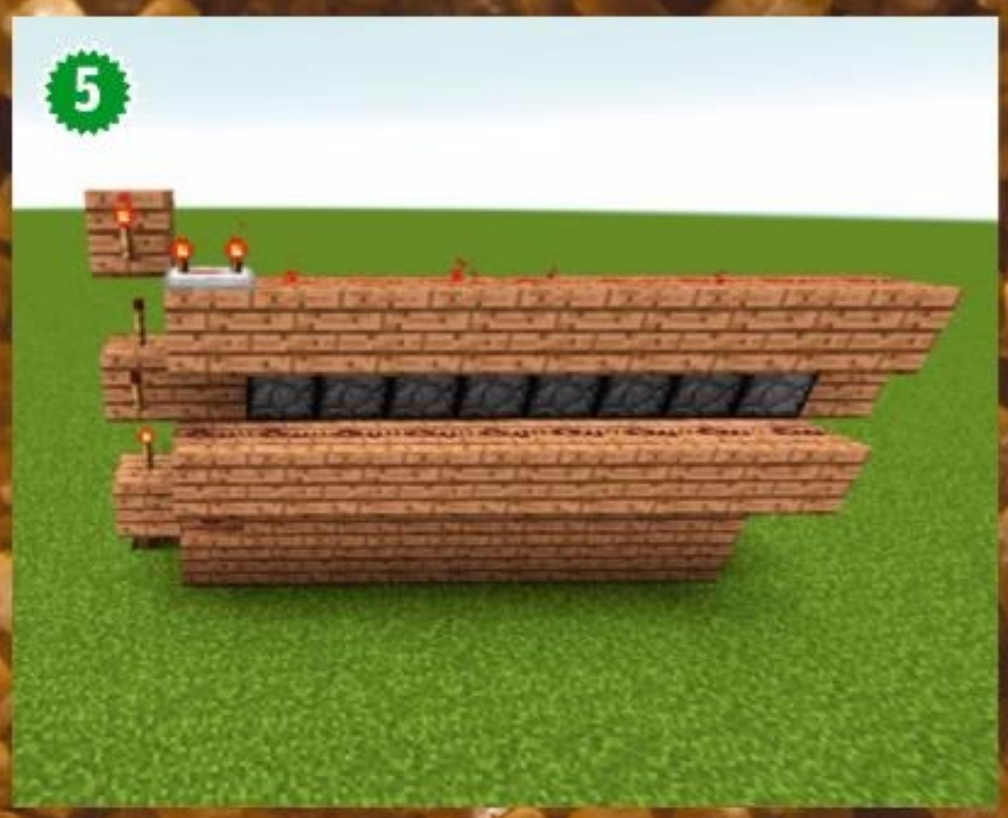

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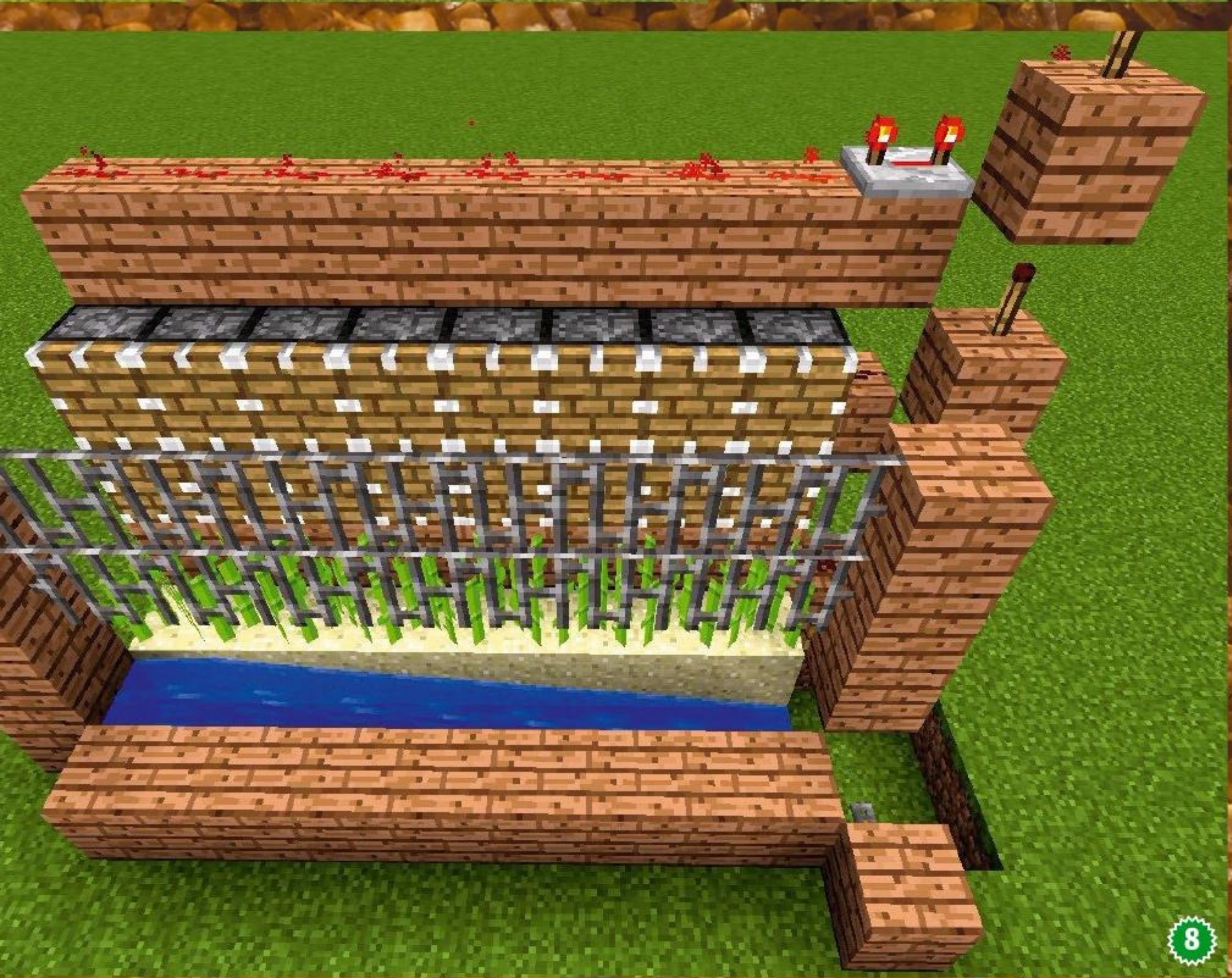

MINECRAFT MASTER

Hints, tips and the best builds around – every issue!

80 Fast Racing Neo

Speed is king and wheels are redundant in this tribute to F-Zero GX's gravity-free racing.

81 Steamworld Heist

This band of tin men have stolen our hearts with their turn-based tactics and ricocheting trickshots.

82 Nuclear Throne

A gang of misshapen weirdos trying to achieve the impossible? Sounds like Team GM.

Story is almost nonexistent – you're dropped on the island with no idea why you're there or what you're doing.

The game plays with perspective, both for puzzles and little hidden secrets like this shadow picture.

overall goal of the game. Prepare yourself, as this is a stern journey.

Uncompromising, it gives you nothing in the way of aid or encouragement. The tutorial consists of little more than teaching you how to interact with the puzzles and telling you there's a run button. After that, you wander the island, interacting with mazes and trying to piece together increasingly complex solutions. Early on, things are fairly simple. You might have black and white dots that you have to draw a line through to separate. Or colours that need to be grouped in pairs. There might be things you have to draw over, or a second 'mirror' line that copies your movements and requires you to consider its path as you draw. (There's also a *super fun* variation on that where the second line is *completely invisible*. Sigh.)

The variations are plentiful, but it's still mazes, and there's a huge amount of mental fatigue to repeating the same thing over and over. Puzzles always appear in groups; four or five here, a sequence of ten there. Each time they lead to, or activate, another set of puzzles. It's a tedious and wearing procession, where you're not always sure quite what the end results will be. There are wires to follow that can sometimes help direct you, but it's all too easy to burn yourself out on a tiring sequence only to find out it's not necessarily what you need to be doing just yet. The volume of it all also means that, either through mental exhaustion or just the plain law of averages, you will get stuck at some point. Unless you can break through the block, that's it for a while. Either try to see what you're not getting, or go off elsewhere and come back later.

I, witness

The game doesn't try to help you much either. There's a needlessly nasty mechanic where, for some sequences, making a mistake deactivates the current maze, meaning you have to reactivate it by re-doing the previous panel. Sometimes it also seems to pile on the rules too, or twist them as soon as you've got a handle on what they want from you. There's usually a code of sorts that helps you work out specific requirements – group these, split those, draw over that. In some cases multiple rules are applied as you progress, with modifiers and alterations as you go. What momentum you build, and the fun you get from finding solutions and solving puzzles, can be stopped dead by this sort of thing.

A great example of this is a sound-based puzzle that requires you to interpret a melody as a solution to a maze. At first it's one of the rare moments you actually feel rewarded, picking out an environmental cue and realising what you need to do. After solving three of these, though, it starts to play horns, klaxons, and phone rings to obscure the guiding tones. Get through those four and the sound clue actually changes to one of the distracting noises, with no warning, to confuse you even further. Before finally popping up an impassable barrier with the last six ludicrously *hidden on the other side*.

"THERE'S A HUGE AMOUNT OF MENTAL FATIGUE TO REPEATING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER"

ANATOMY OF A MAZE

How to get from A to B

The basic setup of any of the game's mazes involves a circular start area, and a small exit node somewhere on a grid. To complete the puzzle you simply have to draw a line between the two. This basic rule is quickly varied and changed with the addition of things like broken paths and symbols to interpret, with progression upping the complexity as you get to grips with the concepts. In this example you can see black and white dots. To complete the maze you have to reach the exit while separating the black and white dots with the line you draw. The first few examples teach you this with very basic layouts, but over time the puzzles escalate in size and complexity.

BLOW BY BLOW

Heading back in time

The Witness is the next game from Jonathan Blow, the indie game developer behind Braid. You might have heard of that one because the critically acclaimed time-manipulating platformer was a breakout hit that fronted the early rise of indie games in the mainstream around seven years ago.

Braid's arty take on the traditional platformer hid a range of devious and brilliant temporal mechanics that had you altering the flow of time to progress. As well as its innovative gameplay, its narrative caused plenty of discussion, with numerous interpretations of the motives and reasons behind the events, and actions of its hero, Tim, as he searched for a missing princess. Blow has stated that the game was meant to deconstruct and challenge traditional gaming motifs, and asserts that the ambiguous ending, and plot overall, is impossible to explain completely. The game's impact and reception mean that many have been waiting eagerly to see what Blow would do next and how he would apply his narrative and philosophical ideas to The Witness.

There are some genuinely brilliant puzzles and some proper Sherlock moments in here but be warned: you will go crazy. Our wall is covered in notes, diagrams, and chicken-scratch maze solutions. Some puzzles have taken days, unhelped by the game's tendency to try and slip in alterations and rule changes. Sometimes fun but mostly maddening. It feels like a shorter, better curated set of challenges would have been better – something where the ratio of solutions to puzzles was more rewarding. Nothing kills the mood like spending an entire evening trying to solve a set of puzzles that open a door, only to find *more* on the other side.

Isle be damned

As some solutions can be so tricksy to discover, trial and error ends up being part and parcel to figuring out what's going on. We don't expect too much hand holding, but a little encouragement goes a long way. The Witness seems to care very little about what you're doing. The only time it ever acknowledges your presence is when you successfully solve something. Even then it's only to activate the next puzzle or maybe open a door.

The island itself is at least small. You can probably complete a circuit in a couple of minutes and get between areas in a few seconds (there's also a kind of fast travel system involving a boat you can initially unlock via yet more puzzles). It is a pretty place too: a hyper-coloured, super stylised landscape that creates some wonderful views. It's not uncommon to turn a corner or reach a new area early on and see something truly beautiful. But the lack of any other substance means it's a hollow experience. Little music and minimal sound ensure it all feels a touch empty.

Despite being rammed with puzzles, the world lacks any real punch. It's bright, but plasticky. There are a few statues in some areas, melodramatically striking symbolic poses. People fighting, carrying heavy loads, recoiling in fear, and the like. You can also find video clips and audio diaries, that seem to be a clumsy attempt to make things feel more intelligent than they actually are by throwing in highbrow concepts with all the care of wads of paint hurled at a wall. There are quotes from an astronaut talking about his time in space, clips from an old science history show, an extract from a book called Zen Physics, a bit from a 19th century essay called the The Ethics Of Belief. They're all long winded, several minutes in some cases, and ultimately filling a repetitious world with other people's clever ideas doesn't make the game itself any smarter. Especially when there's such a lack of nuance, and everything's held together so minimally and inertly. It feels like a case of the emperor's new clothes in the making – some thoughts from Victorian-era philosopher William K. Clifford? Very profound, your majesty.

It makes The Witness a very odd experience. It's capable of making you feel amazing when you 'get' something, but it's also callous in its indifference. Stuck? Uncertain or unsure? Tough. This game that has no time for the weak. You won't get any help. Some will relish the challenge and there's something to be said for the achievements to be had. However, if the idea of 'Dark Souls: Maze Edition' doesn't appeal then approach with utmost caution. ■

The mountain is the key to The Witness. It contains a box gradually unlocked by light beams as you complete areas.

Some puzzles have solutions hidden in the environment, so you have to be aware of the world around you.

GM LOVES...

- It's a beautiful and highly stylised space to explore.
- Some of the more interesting puzzles can be very satisfying.

GM HATES...

- Much of the game is built on tiring maze-solving mechanics.
- Repetition, rule changes, and difficulty spikes kill the fun.

Better than...

Actual mazes
The problem with real mazes is that you can't see anything once you're inside them, and being lost for real is never really much fun.

Worse than...

The Room
Its devious puzzle-solving mystery is a hugely rewarding test of detective skills as you look for clues and piece together solutions.

NEED TO KNOW

The Witness has had a truly epic development period, having been in the works since 2008. It was originally planned for release on the PS3 and 360 before Blow decided to focus on PS4.

GM JUDGEMENT

69%

Sometimes rewarding, but highly repetitive, this puzzle game drives its core idea into the ground.
Leon Hurley

BLOW BY BLOW

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Isle be damned

As some solutions can be so tricksy to discover, trial and error ends up being part and parcel to figuring out what's going on. We don't expect too much hand holding, but a little encouragement goes a long way. The Witness seems to care very little about what you're doing. The only time it ever acknowledges your presence is when you successfully solve something. Even then it's only to activate the next puzzle or maybe open a door.

The island itself is at least small. You can probably complete a circuit in a couple of minutes and get between areas in a few seconds (there's also a kind of fast travel system involving a boat you can initially unlock via yet more puzzles). It is a pretty place too: a hyper-coloured, super stylised landscape that creates some wonderful views. It's not uncommon to turn a corner or reach a new area early on and see something truly beautiful. But the lack of any other substance means it's a hollow experience. Little music and minimal sound ensure it all feels a touch empty.

Despite being rammed with puzzles, the world lacks any real punch. It's bright, but plasticky. There are a few statues in some areas, melodramatically striking symbolic poses. People fighting, carrying heavy loads, recoiling in fear, and the like. You can also find video clips and audio diaries, that seem to be a clumsy attempt to make things feel more intelligent than they actually are by throwing in highbrow concepts with all the care of wads of paint hurled at a wall. There are quotes from an astronaut talking about his time in space, clips from an old science history show, an extract from a book called Zen Physics, a bit from a 19th century essay called the The Ethics Of Belief. They're all long winded, several minutes in some cases, and ultimately filling a repetitious world with other people's clever ideas doesn't make the game itself any smarter. Especially when there's such a lack of nuance, and everything's held together so minimally and inertly. It feels like a case of the emperor's new clothes in the making – some thoughts from Victorian-era philosopher William K. Clifford? Very profound, your majesty.

It makes The Witness a very odd experience. It's capable of making you feel amazing when you 'get' something, but it's also callous in its indifference. Stuck? Uncertain or unsure? Tough. This game that has no time for the weak. You won't get any help. Some will relish the challenge and there's something to be said for the achievements to be had. However, if the idea of 'Dark Souls: Maze Edition' doesn't appeal then approach with utmost caution. ■

The mountain is the key to The Witness. It contains a box gradually unlocked by light beams as you complete areas.

Some puzzles have solutions hidden in the environment, so you have to be aware of the world around you.

GM LOVES...

- It's a beautiful and highly stylised space to explore.
- Some of the more interesting puzzles can be very satisfying.

GM HATES...

- Much of the game is built on tiring maze-solving mechanics.
- Repetition, rule changes, and difficulty spikes kill the fun.

Better than...

Actual mazes
The problem with real mazes is that you can't see anything once you're inside them, and being lost for real is never really much fun.

Worse than...

The Room
Its devious puzzle-solving mystery is a hugely rewarding test of detective skills as you look for clues and piece together solutions.

NEED TO KNOW

The Witness has had a truly epic development period, having been in the works since 2008. It was originally planned for release on the PS3 and 360 before Blow decided to focus on PS4.

GM JUDGEMENT

69%

Sometimes rewarding, but highly repetitive, this puzzle game drives its core idea into the ground.
Leon Hurley

GM

Review

The Final Verdict!

The tracks are rich with detail, including camera drones flying overhead and cheering fans on the sidelines.

GM GOLD AWARD

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Rally cars through the ages.

The impressive range of cars spans sixty years of rally racing. From '60s classics like the Mini Cooper to '80s Group B cars, it's like an interactive history lesson.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Codemasters **Developer** Codemasters **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-8

DIRT RALLY

A hardcore rally sim that will test your skills to the limit

Returning to the realistic roots of the Colin McRae series, this latest entry is a refreshingly gimmick-free simulation of slinging a big, dangerous car around mud-caked tests of pure driving skill. It's a simulation game in the rawest sense, with punishing physics and authentic handling that's constantly fighting against you.

The Dirt series has, over the past few years, gotten too cool for its own good, turning its baseball cap backwards, saying 'yo', and necking cans of Monster. But Dirt Rally strips all that away. There's no rawk music or daft 'gymkhana' events: it's all about driving fast and hard – and it's brilliant.

The main thing to remember is that Dirt Rally hates you. It tries everything it can to make you fail a race, whether it's sending you hurtling off the side of a mountain and irreparably destroying your car, throwing snow and rain at your windshield so you can't see, or surprising you with a last-minute hairpin bend. As you scream along its gravel roads, icy tarmac, thick snow, and rain-soaked bogs, you're constantly at war with your vehicle. It's forever threatening to spin out, lose traction, or skid hopelessly into hard objects, and that's what makes it so thrilling. It's a gruelling, intense test of your ability, and a pitched battle against the laws of physics.

But it's a war you can win. As well as dexterity and the ability to listen closely to your co-driver, bravery is key to success. The tracks want you to slow down – to ease your car carefully around corners – but you have to resist. It's all about the balance between precise, attentive driving and pushing the limits. About going *slightly* too fast on that straight, or taking that bend a *little* too aggressively. You have to make snap decisions in the heat of the moment. They might be disastrous, or you'll beat the odds and navigate a tricky track with confident elegance. It's mostly the former, but chasing the exhilaration of the latter is what keeps you playing.

Rallying cry

Your reward for this kind of courageous (or foolish, depending on how you look at it) driving is shaving a few seconds off your time. Dirt Rally is a celebration of the purity of rally driving. There's no XP system, fancy career mode, or rivals to beat – the satisfaction comes from mastering the track, taming your car, and setting a good time when you cross the finish line. Rally enthusiasts will love this stripped back approach, but casual

"IT'S AN INTENSE TEST OF YOUR ABILITY, AND A PITCHED BATTLE AGAINST THE LAWS OF PHYSICS"

KING OF THE HILL

Can you handle the perils of Pikes Peak?

One of the most challenging modes in Dirt Rally is Hillclimb. Based on a real event, also known as the Race To The Clouds, it sees you driving to the top of Pikes Peak in Colorado. It's 12 miles of tight corners and deadly drops, and by the end you'll have climbed 4,000 feet. The game features two versions of the track: one comprised entirely of tarmac, and an extra challenging variation with mixed surfaces. You'll need nerves of steel to make it to the top without destroying your car or driving off the edge.

If you have an especially bad crash, the windshield can get damaged, and you'll have to finish the race by peering through shattered glass.
The cars all have authentic, lovingly recreated interiors with fully functioning dashboards. The attention to detail is seriously impressive.
Playing in the cockpit cam is a real challenge, especially with dust, rain, and snow trying their best to obscure your vision. One for the purists.
Your co-driver will shout out instructions, warning you of dangers ahead and describing the severity of upcoming corners. Listen to him!

racing fans may find it a little too hardcore for its own good.

In making the game, Codemasters developed a brand new engine designed to replicate the real-world physics of rally driving as closely as possible. And you realise just how dedicated to realism the game is when you start your first race by immediately skidding stupidly into a ditch. Try to play it like a traditional racer, or a recent Dirt game, and you'll make a fool of yourself. You have to *tease* the throttle and brakes rather than slam them. It feels great with a controller, but with a good force-feedback wheel and pedals it's on another level.

The sound design is superb, and really helps sell the weight and power of the cars. On gravel roads you hear stones being kicked up and pinging against the metal. Your chassis creaks and groans as you drive over bumpy terrain. Heavy rain taps hypnotically at the windows. They're subtle details, but they give the game a palpable feeling of physicality. There's no music during a race, either: just your co-driver's navigation calls and the sound of your car battling the elements.

The courses are spread across several countries, and each offers its own challenge, from the weather to the track surface. Powys, Wales is grey, wet, and muddy, with nerve-wracking forest sections. Monte Carlo features tight, icy tarmac roads. Argolis, Greece is dry and dusty, with terrifyingly sheer drops. They all look fantastic, especially the rain-soaked Welsh countryside, and trackside details bring them to life. You'll see camera drones buzzing over you, people gathered on hillsides to watch, and emergency vehicles waiting patiently for you to crash.

Pay dirt

The cars are all rendered with fine, hand-crafted detail, including rally classics like the Lancia Stratos, Subaru Impreza, and Mini Cooper. From the 1960s through to the modern day, every vehicle has its own distinct personality. Tearing around a gravel track in a rickety little Mini Cooper feels very different from doing it in a modern rally-tuned car. The handling is weighty and responsive, creating a powerful sensation that you're in command of a big, heavy lump of metal and machinery. From a pure driving perspective, it's one of the best games the motorsport veterans at Codemasters has ever made.

But it won't be for everyone. Dirt Rally is an almost sadistically unforgiving game. If you only dip into racing games occasionally, it'll take a while to get to grips with that rich, nuanced, physics-heavy handling. And even if you're a veteran of the genre, you'll spend your first few hours battering your car to pieces and sliding off the track. It's the Dark Souls of driving simulators. But, like that game, sticking with it and mastering its systems can be deeply rewarding. When you make it through one of those hard-as-nails Swedish tracks in one piece, and at the top of the leaderboard, it's incredibly satisfying.

As well as traditional rally events, there's also Hillclimb, which sees you driving a very fast car up a very steep mountain, and Rallycross, which presents a much more familiar driving game experience. Here, up to eight cars race on a looped track at close quarters, and it's a nice change of pace from the lonely solo rallies. Championships are the closest thing you get to a career mode. You start out limited to a handful of retro '60s cars, but winning races earns you money that you can use to buy better, more modern ones. It's just a shame you earn currency so slowly, because it makes it feel like a grind.

Dirt Rally is a starkly minimalist, lean racing game and a lovingly crafted recreation of the sport. The harsh challenge it presents will turn some people off, but if you want a racing game that's free of gimmicks and fancy extras – and celebrates the raw, knife-edge, man-versus-machine thrills of rally racing – you can't do much better. Codemasters has become one of the best racing studios in the world, and this is one of their most impressive simulations to date. Colin McRae would be proud. ■

How often did Andy find himself upside down in muddy ditches? Most of the time. And in the game too.

GM LOVES...

- This is one of the most exhilarating racers around.
- It looks beautiful, especially in rainy weather.

GM HATES...

- The rock-hard difficulty can be too punishing at times.
- Earning money to buy new cars feels like a grind.

Better than...

Dirt 3
It's more accessible and forgiving, but the previous game in the Dirt series feels lightweight and arcade-y compared to the brutal Dirt Rally.

Worse than...

Gran Turismo 6
The sheer variety of cars and race types on offer, and the rich, balanced handling, keep the racing crown firmly on Gran Turismo's shiny head.

NEED TO KNOW

The game was first released in April through Steam Early Access. This version of the game was sold at a reduced price, and the dev used player feedback to tweak and improve the handling.

GM JUDGEMENT

88%

An intense, thrilling rally sim with punishingly realistic physics and deep, nuanced handling.
Andy Kelly

Courses take you under the sea, through a busy city, between crumbling mountains, and even to space. Give those engineers a medal.
Want an expert tip? For a fast start, hold the acceleration button as the number 2 fades from your screen. Boom! Now maintain the lead for three laps.
There's up-to-four-person multiplayer, and online too, but visuals and framerate downgrade to almost handheld calibre in splitscreen.
Using the shoulder buttons to lean left and right not only helps you take better corners, but also to fine-tune your turning to nab boost orbs.

Format Wii U **Publisher** Shin'en Multimedia **Developer** Shin'en Multimedia **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

FAST RACING NEO

Help, Jeremy Clarkson's head just exploded

Over ten years since F-Zero GX and no sequel in sight – what's a fan of anti-gravity racers featuring vehicles resembling futuristic vacuum cleaners to do? Well, there's this. Not only is the latest from Shin'en (Art Of Balance, Nano Assault Neo) one word removed from having a legendarily crap name, but it speeds uncannily close to Nintendo's series.

Courses here are clearly inspired by the GameCube classic: Chuoku City, the equivalent of Aeropolis, winds through gleaming skyscrapers; Sunahara Desert (Sand Ocean) contains giant burrowing worms; Mueller Pacific (Big Blue) spirals under the waves. It's all visually luscious despite the déjà vu, sparks, sun flare and spitting rain combining with steadily pinholing speed blur to make you feel all of the 600km/h you're reaching.

There's real effort to give each track a distinguishing feature, whether that's landslides in the aptly named Avalanche Valley, lumbering spider bots on graffiti-stricken motorway Kamagori City, or sequences in Daitoshi Station where the road falls away and you have to fly through stretches of space while avoiding floating balls of rock. Juxtaposing sleek futurism with crumbling ancient architecture in courses both artificial and natural gives the world a sense of legacy.

Anti-gravity rush

The focus here is racing. It's easy to make such a game – one in which your vehicle barely touches the ground – feel flimsy and cheap like a paper airplane, but this is satisfyingly weighty. Oh, and *hard*. Sometimes detrimentally so, as a single crash can drop you from first to last by respawning you a *little* too far back. As in a mach ten bobsled run, you need knowledge of turns for a podium finish, and if you want further proof of difficulty there's Hero Mode, unlocked after you complete the game's first four tournaments, which mirrors courses, limits lives, and blows you apart if you overuse your boost.

There are no rockets to pick up or mines to plant, just orbs you grab to fill your turbo. It makes for a fairer game – no need to sweat about distant tailgaters wrecking you with randomly awarded power weapons (refreshingly, there's no catch-up) – but sometimes such pacifist inclinations cut the sense of competition.

Jostling, for instance, is minimal. It's impossible to crash unless through unforced error (ramping off a jump into the sea, driving headfirst into a fan blade), so other racers are more obstacles than opponents. And since a ten-craft cap limits the length of time you'll actually see them on-screen, often you're essentially racing yourself. There are several machines to pick from, but not much handling difference between them.

The battle is more against the track, as you use the left bumper to switch colour alignment and match boost pads. Go blue when on a blue for a blast of speed, and orange over orange. It's an extra dynamic that approaches rhythm action territory, conjuring images of Audiosurf, and often proves the difference between defeat and victory.

All this makes for a challenging, involved, and surprisingly engaging racer that, while shallower than F-Zero GX, is a worthy heir to its long-empty throne. ■

"COURSES ARE CLEARLY INSPIRED BY F-ZERO GX, BUT IT'S ALL LUSCIOUS AND THE FOCUS HERE IS RACING"

What's the best way to convey this game's sense of speed? Grab your face and pull your skin back while going "Aaarrgh!".

GM LOVES...

- There's a real sense of speed – crazy, scary speed.
- Each inventive course presents some new obstacle or feature.

GM HATES...

- The number of opponents being capped at nine cuts their impact.
- There's little handling difference between ships – only aesthetic.

Better than...

Wipeout HD
A shiny but ultimately sterile take on far-future anti-gravity racing, that tells you how fast you're going instead of making you feel it.

Worse than...

F-Zero GX
Nintendo hasn't made a sequel simply because this one's still brilliant, even after all this time – an intense test of skill, reflexes, and nerve.

2ND OPINION

"The F-Zero GX inspiration may be a bit... blatant, but this speedy gem really feels like an authentic throwback to early 2000s gaming values, and that makes it a breath of fresh, exhaust-rich air in today's sim-heavy racing market."
Justin Towell, Reviews Editor, GamesRadar+

GM JUDGEMENT

71%

Forsaking weapons for furiously fast racing, this is a worthy stand-in – not usurper – to F-Zero GX.
Ben Griffin

Bouncing shots off walls is one of the game's greatest pleasures, and a vital tactic when enemies are hiding behind cover.

Format 3DS **Publisher** Image & Form **Developer** Image & Form **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

STEAMWORLD HEIST

Robbing robots pull off a stainless steal

The things we do for hats. Shoot a headwarmer off the metal craniums of your robot foes in Image & Form's superb turn-based tactical shooter and you'll claim it as your own, granting the ultimate bragging rights. But de-hatting a bot and taking the prize are quite different matters – especially when it lands in the middle of an open space hangar with all manner of hostile weaponry aiming your way.

You could sprint out and get it in one move, but you'd be left open to attack. Even worse, you might get completely demolished, meaning you'd miss out on that mission's entire EXP payout. Or you could play it safe, taking cover and picking them off one by one. But that's hardly in the spirit of a daring heist, is it?

The answer, of course, is to bounce a long-range shot off the wall with your sniper, hitting an explosive barrel to take out two bots on the right, get your dumbbell-pumping strongman to fire a rocket up into the girders to smash the turret, and use your speedy, unicycle-bound con-man to wheel past them all and flank the last manned tank, leaving you free to saunter up and grab your prize along with the rest of the ship's treasure. SteamWorld Heist isn't simply about survival: this is a crafty battle of right angles, pop-shots and stretching your gun's line of sight to breaking point, defying the limits of your surroundings, and physics, to take home the prize.

A view to a kill

With complete freedom to aim in real time, Heist's randomly generated space hulls are playgrounds of opportunity. Each mission dictates the size of your team, but you'll quickly assemble such a varied cast of rag-tag robots that you'll be spoilt for choice on who to bring. It's only as threats evolve over the course of a lengthy adventure that you begin to appreciate the full spectrum of the available skills, enlisting new talent as challenges shift from flammable oil spills to teleporting electrobots and an infuriating number of reinforcement alarms.

Luckily, the sheer size and layout of each individual pod prevents the game from ever slipping into routine, striking just the right balance between intense micro-management and the thrill of moment-to-moment gunplay. It doesn't dwell too heavily on numbers either, as no matter how strong your weapon is, it's useless if you can't aim. This might disappoint stat-obsessed strategy fans, but when each mission has you poring over the exact trajectory of each bullet, you'll be too busy lining up trick shots to care about whether going into cover should add +1 to your defence.

The only place where it misses the mark is during mission downtime. With no way to compare goods to your current inventory, it's hard to tell if anything is a good investment, and your stingy inventory allowance can often mean you have to sell the swag you've just stolen, casting a rather cruel shadow over your victory. Still, it's better to take a bullet here, in the game's harmless backend, than suffer a mechanical fault on the field where the fun really lies. It might lack the nuance of some other turn-based strategy games, but its marriage of mental smarts and practical skill is quite unlike anything else. We take our hat off to it. Please don't shoot it. ■

"STRETCHING YOUR GUN'S LINE OF SIGHT TO BREAKING POINT, DEFYING THE LIMITS OF PHYSICS"

How often were we tempted to get out our protractor while playing SteamWorld Heist on the train? Too many times to count.

GM LOVES...

- Pulling off killer trick shots from across the room feels ace.
- The soundtrack's brilliantly atmospheric and catchy.

GM HATES...

- You can only tool-up your team in the mission loadout screen.
- Your inventory is off-limits when shopping for new items.

Better than...

Code Name: S.T.E.A.M.
Abraham Lincoln might not be your commanding officer, but we know who'd be wearing his hat if he duelled with Captain Piper.

Worse than...

Fire Emblem Awakening
The cast of Heist are a capable bunch, but they'd be infinitely improved with some steam-powered pegasi.

NEED TO KNOW

The game's music was composed by San Diego band Steam Powered Giraffe, known for dressing up as steampunk robots for performances. A match made in Heaven, then.

GM JUDGEMENT

88%

The inventory system's a little rusty, but SteamWorld Heist still gives you plenty of bang for your buck.
Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman

You'll unlock additional mutants as you play, and each has its own unique ability mapped to the left trigger.

Format PS4, PC, PS3, PS Vita **Publisher** Vlambeer **Developer** Vlambeer **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-2

NUCLEAR THRONE

A twin-stick roguelike that's fit for a king

Dutch developer Vlambeer is rightly known as a top-tier purveyor of arcade panache, producing delicacies such as Luftrausers, Ridiculous Fishing, and Super Crate Box. The latest addition to this illustrious stable is another experiment in focused purity, taking the roguelike as its starting point and adding a heckuva lot of bullets.

Playing as a dejected mutant survivor of the nuclear apocalypse, you're on a hunt for the titular bum rest, a legendary artefact said to have the power to restore your world. Each run begins at your campfire, from which you'll choose a mutant before setting out through stage after stage of procedurally generated wasteland in pursuit of your mystic goal.

Each themed level is overrun with irradiated beasties, of course, but there's a tremendous arsenal of weaponry with which to dispatch them. Even the default revolver emits a satisfyingly sharp crack, but once you've got your mitts on a triple-barrelled minigun or otherworldly energy weapon, the twin-stick shooting starts to feel wonderfully weighty. And while wandering the wasteland is dangerous, it turns out that a hefty dose of radiation has its advantages: levelling is handled by way of collectable plutonium rods that produce hideous but powerful mutations.

Game of throne

There's a certain grody charm to this system, and indeed the entire game, which frequently inspires a kind of delighted disgust. Dispatch one of the wasteland's overgrown worms, for instance, and it ruptures with a damp squelch, revealing a host of ravenous maggots within. The sewers, meanwhile, are host to giant decomposing rats who wander the pipes with polished ribcages exposed, serving as hideous mobile spawn points for smaller rodents. And then there're robot wolves, which stalk you with lupine cunning and attack with back-mounted laser cannons.

At some point you will meet your end at the hands of just about every one of these foes, such is the fragility of your avatar and the hostility of the gameworld. Nuclear Throne almost veers into bullet hell territory at times, as you nervously thread through a dense weave of enemy projectiles. It all makes for an agreeably tense experience, bolstered no end by charmingly chunky pixel art mutants, gloriously crunchy sound effects, and a mournfully folksy soundtrack that lends a patina of fragile optimism to the whole thing. There are almost no narrative interventions to speak of, but Vlambeer's mastery of tone hints that the search for the throne might be doomed from the start, pursued purely for the sense of purpose it gives the desolate survivors.

Perhaps the only disappointment is the co-op mode. With two players on screen, a degree of precision is lost in the chaos of twitching reticles and dodging characters, while a punitive revive mechanic often brings promising runs to a frustratingly early end. It's a welcome addition, to be sure, but the tension and flow of the single player experience aren't quite captured in co-operative play.

In all other regards, however, Nuclear Throne is true to Vlambeer form. It's tightly-focused, meticulously-crafted, and every flourish – from the sonorous boom of a shotgun blast to the nasty burst of a giant worm's belly – sings. ■

"YOU'LL MEET AN END AT THE HANDS OF JUST ABOUT EVERY FOE, SUCH IS THE HOSTILITY OF THE GAMEWORLD"

Favourite character? We recommend Robot, who can gobble unwanted weapons in exchange for ammo and HP boosts.

GM LOVES...

- The taut gunplay makes every encounter a joyous murder-fest.
- The fantastic soundtrack gets you humming along as you go.
- It's brutally tough, but defeat rarely feels unfair.

GM HATES...

- The shared screen co-op mode is too busy to excel.

Better than...

The Binding Of Isaac
Nuclear Throne is structurally similar to McMillen's sinister gem, but Vlambeer's effort offers more satisfying, textured combat.

Worse than...

Hotline Miami
Both games excel in terms of soundtrack, stylisation and gunplay, but Dennaton's narrative ambition gives it the edge.

NEED TO KNOW

Nuclear Throne has been available on Steam Early Access for more than two years, developing from a barebones prototype to finished product over the course of more than 90 updates.

GM JUDGEMENT

91%

A frantic roguelike that looks, sounds and feels fantastic. An essential addition to the genre.
James Nouch

Miss too many sequences and this energy bar will deplete faster than a phone battery in a microwave. If it bottoms out, you've failed the song.
Once you finish a section of the track, you'll need to hop from one lane to the other. The glowing notes tell you which one you need to hit first.
These little colourful stones are your notes, the things you need to hit in time to keep that sweet tune juice flowing thick and fast.
This power-up, usable both in single-player and multiplayer, slows everything to mobility scooter speed, making it just that bit kinder.
ENERGY
SEDATE
21

Format PS4 **Publisher** Harmonix **Developer** Harmonix **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

AMPLITUDE

Amped up and on track

Back before rhythm games involved acquiring enough peripherals to launch the world's largest supergroup, Harmonix cooked up Frequency and Amplitude on PS2, and for those who got the chance to play them, an obsession was born. Now, thanks to about fourteen thousand backers on Kickstarter, the world gets another chance to give the series the love it so richly deserves. But don't mistake this for a simple retread, because this rhythm action gem offers plenty of surprises. And by that we mean... well, it's actually a concept album.

Yep, in what turns out to be a rather ingenious plan, this sequel/reboot/renaissance crafts a musical journey of love, longing, and trying to wake someone up from a coma using the power of songs for its campaign mode, all told via the lyrics of the tunes you play. It's bonkers in the best way possible and adds just enough intrigue to the big beats and catchy hooks to make breezing through it a delight.

But how do you play the game? Good question, but let's keep it brief. Songs are split into lanes, each having three tracks on which notes appear, which you bust with L1 (left), R1 (middle), and R2 (right) as you fly through them. When you clear a short section of the track, it crumbles away and you need to hop to the next one, which starts building up your multiplier streak. Miss too many and you're sent packing to Losersville.

Jet sounds

Amplitude's early difficulty levels are designed to ease you into the game, allowing you to fly through the campaign mode – on the aforementioned difficulty, it can be done in around two hours – and give you a chance to unlock tracks so you can focus on racking up high scores. Those are tackled in quick play, which has another 16 songs to go along with the campaign's album worth (bringing the total up to 31, stat fans). Each has its own high score table, providing the dangling carrot of longevity.

To trouble the upper reaches, you need to play on the hardest difficulties, where waves of notes come crashing in almost unbearably quickly. With practice, you get used to the finger dancing patterns, and the familiar rhythm action game rush of nailing everything, as a zen blur washes over you. Then it's two days later, the house is burning down, but go on, you've still got time for one more go...

It's also a great couch play multiplayer game, utilising a simple risk/reward mechanic where some lanes are easy to play but low scoring, and some the opposite. In play, matches are frantic and tense, especially in close-scoring games. Play co-op or competitively, add up to four mates, and slowly wind each one up with a variety of powerups designed for dark arts play. It might not have the longevity of Towerfall, but it's certainly good for mixing up the old standards.

Some may be disappointed by the lack of licensed music relative to its predecessor, with the few tracks that did make it in hardly being familiar bangers. By embracing unique musical ideas, however, rather than parading the latest pop hits, it gains a far more distinct personality. It may not revolutionise like the original did, but this is a unique and brilliant rhythm game in its own right. ■

"YOU GET THE RHYTHM ACTION GAME RUSH OF NAILING EVERYTHING AS A ZEN BLUR WASHES OVER YOU"

How quickly did everyone in the office tell Ben to stop singing the game's tunes? Faster than you can say Amplitude.

GM LOVES...

- The music is brilliantly catchy, like a baseball playing virus.
- Demanding difficulty rewards practice – and encourages it.

GM HATES...

- You'll run out of songs to unlock rather too quickly.
- There's no online head-to-head multiplayer on offer.

Better than...

Green Day's 21st Century Breakdown
Do you remember that Green Day did more than one concept album? No, of course not, and for good reason.

Worse than...

Pink Floyd's The Wall
A true concept classic, this seminal instruction guide on leaving kids alone still stands up remarkably well today in every respect.

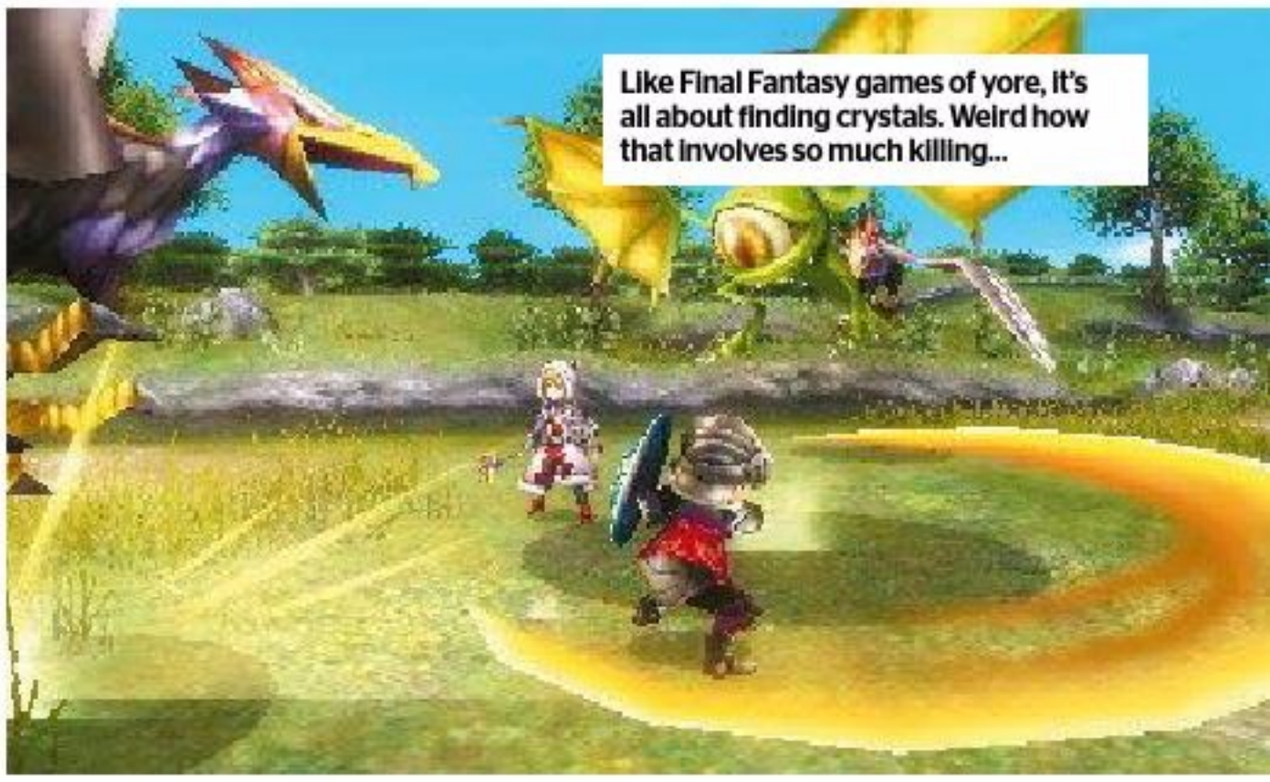
2ND OPINION

"The phrase 'playable concept album' was enough to get me on board, and when I sat down to have a go for myself, I was instantly charmed. The tunes can unfortunately be a little hit and miss, but when they're good, they enable some of my favourite rhythm game action in years."
Robin Valentine, Production Editor

GM JUDGEMENT

85%

Terrifically addictive and filled with songs that you'll want to play repeatedly. The RSI will be worth it.
Ben Tyrer



Format 3DS **Publisher** Square Enix **Developer** Square Enix **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

FINAL FANTASY EXPLORERS

Braving the Final frontier

You simply can't play this and not compare it to Monster Hunter. From its hunting and gathering missions to its hub town, this does everything in its power to stand toe-to-toe with that veteran series, but offers up an all-important Final Fantasy twist. Instead of Insect Glaives and Bow Guns, it's Dragoon leaps and fire magic; instead of roast meat and herbs, it's potions and Phoenix Downs; and instead of cutting up dinosaurs, you're butchering Chocobos (*sobs*).

This is a much more streamlined creature than Monster Hunter, however, one that strips out the over-complicated item uses and menu systems for something that's far easier to get to grips with. While that does mean there aren't nearly as many options to play with here, it really doesn't need them to keep us interested.

There are no tactics involving genre mainstays such as bait to attract monsters, or paint to mark where they travel; all of FF Explorers' smarts lie in its combat and abilities. The basics of fighting are easy to pick up: it's just a case of walking up to a foe and hitting them with abilities until they fall over and fade away, leaving sparkly loot behind. But using different classes and powers is where the real meat of the game lies, and where all of the fun stuff stems from.

Job seekers

There are a total of 21 classic Final Fantasy jobs to choose from, such as Black Mage, Paladin, and Dragoon, all with completely different fighting styles and abilities. For example, Monks may be one of the faster classes and are able to get lots of hits in, but their attack and defence isn't particularly high; Rangers use their bow to pepper enemies from a safe distance, but if a foe catches them up close they're in trouble.

Each job has a range of powerful abilities, whether it's fancy punches or healing magic, and it's putting these together in effective combos that'll lead you to victory. While you'll only have a few jobs unlocked at first, there's a lot of room to experiment with playstyles, and tactically stringing together different ability combos is a delight.

The whole package is geared towards multiplayer, with each job designed to work in tandem with the others. White Mages, for example, can heal your party members or grant them defence-boosting buffs, while Paladins can build up 'malice' so that monsters will only attack them instead of their more vulnerable teammates.

Running around with friends and mashing your enemies into a pulp before collecting their hides is a joy, but there are some limitations. While technically you could all choose to be spear-wielding Dragoons, you won't last long on tougher missions this way. One of you is going to need to play a healing class to support

"YOU WILL HAVE TO FACE THE SAME OPPONENT TEN TIMES IF YOU WANT THAT MOOGLE WAND"

SUMMON STRENGTH

Uncover the big bads

You might already recognise the likes of Ifrit and Ramuh from elsewhere in the vast FF universe, but Explorers adds two new Eidolons to the series. Amaterasu is a light-elemental who sports seven floating blades and is wreathed in flame that shows off her affinity with fire, whereas Dryad is a poisonous plant woman with some seriously bad breath that inflicts several debilitating effects at once. Both add to the general Final Fantasy flavour and would actually make good fits for inclusion in the wider series going forward.

Forming a party and working together also feels a bit like gathering a team in MMO Final Fantasy XIV.

Pulling off flashy moves is really easy, even if you're new to all this – the controls all feel very natural.

IN A TRANCE

Nostalgia ahoy – transform yourself into your favourite Final Fantasy characters

As well as the powerful Crystal Surge that adds an edge to your current abilities, you also learn to trigger an even mightier Trance mode later in the game. There are two types of Trance: one that lets you borrow the power of the Eidolons you've defeated by delivering a massive attack, and one that lets you briefly turn into one of several famous characters from previous games in the Final Fantasy universe.

The first kind of Trance unlocks after you've beaten *all* of the initial set of Eidolons, and you'll need to face them *yet again* to encase them in a Magicite crystal before they kick the bucket, much as you'd throw a poké ball at a weakened Pokémon. Missed your chance or accidentally triggered the wrong Crystal Surge ability to let you do it? Tough. You'll have to fight it again. Yes, *again*. But you will get to use a super powerful attack such as Ifrit's Meteor if you do.

The other type of Trance sees you briefly transform into the likes of Squall, Aerith, and Lightning – any of just under a dozen classic characters in all, from a number of past games in the FF franchise – and borrow their fighting moves. This transformation grants you a temporary boost in power, which comes in handy in particularly tough fights (although it is very short-term, mind). Plus you get to run around as a tiny Cloud to prepare yourself for the FFVII Remake...

the others. Especially if you're going up against one of the game's Eidolon bosses.

If you're a solo player, though, don't feel discouraged: it's perfectly possible to play the game completely as a single-player experience. Enemies scale in difficulty depending on the number of players going up against them, and there's a monster-recruiting mechanic allowing you to manage a group of AI companions to assist you. These are much like the Palicoes in Monster Hunter, though they're not quite as capable and can sometimes get stuck around corners. They're also not as cute. Yes, even the Chocobos. (The ones you don't carve up.)

Some of the classes just don't do as well on their own, however. We initially play as a fast Monk, which was fine until the first boss, when we discovered that it just didn't pack enough of a punch, nor is it able to take one without your health dipping into the red. We got there in the end, but it was gruelling. Switching over to a Paladin or Ranger is a much more manageable choice.

Repeat offender

Eidolons – also known as Summons or Aeons in other Final Fantasy games – are the big bosses of the game, and make for the most fulfilling fights. Encountered in large arenas and with impressive movesets, they take a lot of cunning (and plenty of emergency healing items) to take down. Racing around trying to take on the speedy Shiva with her freezing moves and Diamond Dust attack is a test of your collective battling stamina, and it feels like a truly epic victory once you finally vanquish her.

It comes as a huge disappointment, then, when you realise you have to battle the same Eidolons repeatedly to get the items needed for better gear. While a boss fight might be fun the first or second time, it's a drain by the fifth and a mind-numbing chore by the tenth – and you *will* have to face the same one ten times if you want that Moogle wand. Once you reach the point where more than one Eidolon fight is unlocked, you suddenly find yourself hitting a massive wall in progress that only endless grinding can get you past. There's also only 12 of them. Unfortunately, no matter how fantastic FF Explorers' combat is, this repetition completely taints it and limits its scope.

There are other challenges available such as 'mid-boss rank' beasties, and options you can tick before you start a quest to customise the difficulty of your quarry and the like, but this doesn't change the fact that you're still facing the same foes repeatedly. There are other distractions, though, such as customising your abilities by imbuing them with different effects, a workshop where you can bring your loot to upgrade your equipment or make completely new gear, and a Monster Lab that enables you to create the perfect sidekick to keep you busy. And new ways to experiment constantly open up as you progress, even if you do have to grind to get there.

Ultimately Final Fantasy Explorers is a deliberately light, simplified experience. It feels like training for the more complicated but correspondingly far deeper Monster Hunter series – if you've played one of those games before then this will feel shallow by comparison. Similarly, if you're only a fan of more traditional Final Fantasy games, then you'll find the lack of story jarring (although if FFXV seems just too far away to wait for, Explorers delivers enough of an FF experience to satisfy your cravings for the time being). But if this is your first hunting game, you'll find it a very approachable introduction to one of gaming's most unique genres. ■

Who has the best house in the camp? The Moogles' tent has a pom pom. Need we say more?

GM LOVES...

- It's a great introduction to the genre for newcomers.
- Combat is varied, spectacular enough, and simple to pick up.

GM HATES...

- You need to repeat certain quests too often for gear.
- The lack of real depth really adds to the sense of grind.

Better than...

Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles
The first FF exploring spin-off didn't feel like it was actually related to Final Fantasy at all.

Worse than...

Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate
The monster-hunting game to get. Filled with a vast array of loot and beasties, it's a far deeper experience.

2ND OPINION

"I love Monster Hunter, but I've been moaning about the fact that it changes very little from entry to entry for ages. Explorers feels really fresh in comparison, with a keener focus on simple, unabashed critter-culling. But that foundation of grind-heavy gear crafting is very shaky indeed."
Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

GM JUDGEMENT

74%

Easy to pick up, with some fun FF series links, but making the most of it can be too much of a grind.
Daniella Lucas

NOW PLAYING

This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM

1 RAINBOW SIX SIEGE
PS4
It needs to do more to enable tactical play, but when I'm in a pitched gunfight with a destructible environment and a sledgehammer, I'm happy. And in the game, too.
Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

2 STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT
PS4
This game was the driving force behind me purchasing a PS4, and I can't put it down. The fact that my eight-year-old son beats me on every mode isn't a problem... honest.
Sam Freeman, Art Editor

3 SUNLESS SEA
PC
Despite the clunky interface, loading up this game of Lovecraftian naval exploration truly feels like stepping into another world, in a way few others have ever managed.
Robin Valentine, Production Editor

4 BORDERLANDS 2
PC
Co-op gaming doesn't get much better than this. I've been blasting through this RPG shooter again with a friend lately and loving every minute.
Robin Valentine, Production Editor

5 RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER
XO
Still ploughing my way through this epic on breaks from Battlefront – it makes a nice breather from X-Wings! It just gets better and better the further through I get.
Sam Freeman, Art Editor

6 CIVILIZATION V
PC
My shiny new Steam Controller has given this epic strategy classic a new lease of sofa-based life. Haptic feedback track pads FTW.
Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH:

NUCLEAR THRONE
PS4
The more we played this gem's slightly janky co-op together, the more we just wanted to go it alone. We do all hate each other, though.

The game gets a lot of character across even in such tiny portrait pictures.

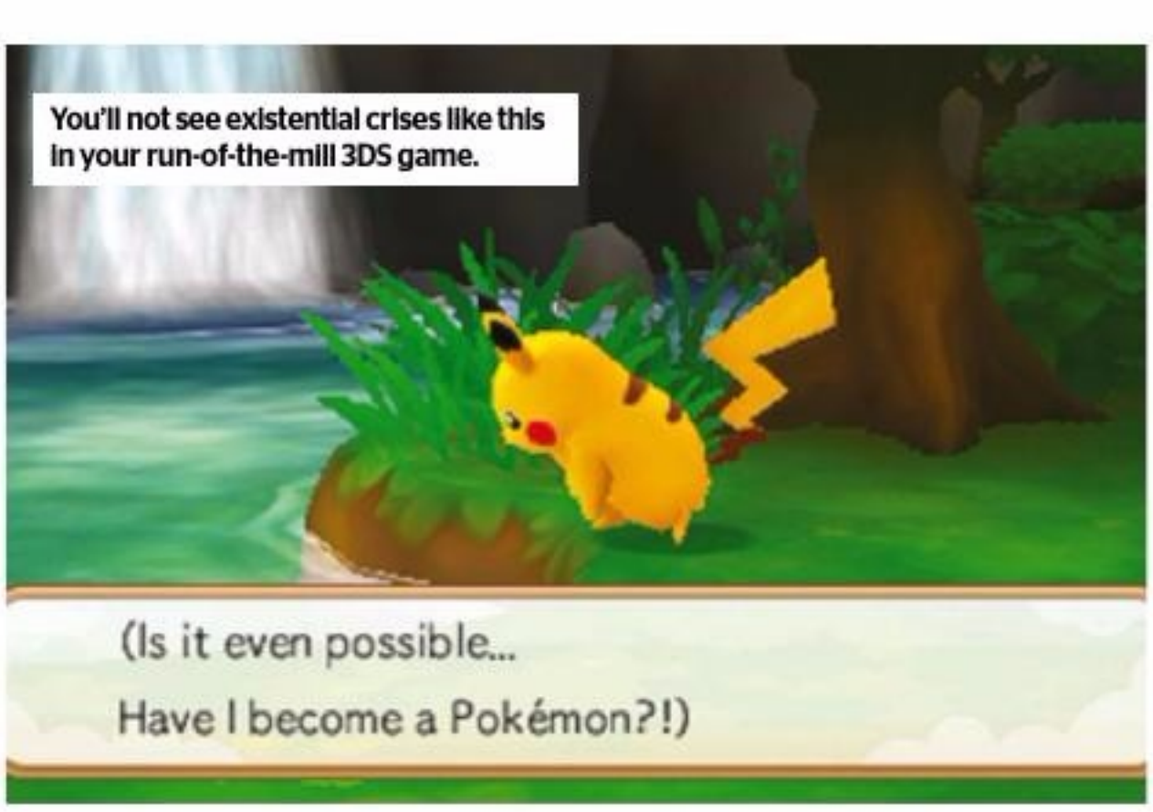
Format 3DS **Publisher** Nintendo **Developer** Spike Chunsoft **ETA** 19 February **Players** 1

POKÉMON SUPER MYSTERY DUNGEON

A bit of a Slowpoke

Ever wondered which Pokémon you'd be? Well this dungeon-exploring spin-off will let you find out. After a short personality quiz that determines which 'mon you are, you find yourself in their world, where you discover that the beasts are being turned to stone. It's up to you to uncover why.

The story and dialogue feels charming but simplistic, and it does take quite a while to actually get going, but it'll be great for younger gamers. The tactics involved in the actual dungeon exploring, however, can be really complex, which feels at odds with that child-friendly plot. As well as planning ahead for your typical type-matching Pokémon antics (water beats fire, etc) there are also items, teammates, and hunger levels to manage. While you might get lucky with a quick escape on some floors, others will leave you fumbling for ages, your inventory of items quickly depleting. You'll also frequently find yourself out-levelled by your opponents, so you'll have to consider which attack boosters to use.



You'll not see existential crises like this in your run-of-the-mill 3DS game.

'Mon share

The art of battle itself is very similar to the main Pokémon series in many ways – you have four attacks available to you at any one time (though here they're mapped to face buttons, and you're fighting in real time), and if you learn a new one you'll have to decide which existing one to replace. But despite it being more action-based than the main games, it actually feels far more laborious. A fight here is an irritating obstacle, rather than an amazing event.

The biggest draw, however, has to be the ability to recruit all 720 Pokémon, even if doing so is a tall order. You can get new partners to join you by talking to them or undertaking quests on their behalf, and there's a strong social element. While you can nab and use more powerful Pokémon to make your own custom team, you're forced to use your starting character for all of the story missions – something that becomes frustrating if you enter a dungeon filled with enemies that happen to be strong against your element. ■

72%

Format PS4 **Pub** Sony **Dev** Valkyrie Entertainment **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

GUNS UP

Player-versus-payer

Ever since it became clear that mobile base-building sensation Clash Of Clans was making enough cash to see Scrooge McDuck choke on his cornflakes, developers have been queuing up to have a crack at the player-versus-player free-to-play formula. Valkyrie Entertainment is the latest to step up to the plate, with an endearing take on twentieth century warfare.

In keeping with the genre's conventions, Guns Up has you building a base before setting out to besiege other players' installations, and while you don't have direct control over your teeny troopers, a range of powerups give you the opportunity to turn the tide of battle. A well-aimed missile might take out an enemy barracks before it can spawn reinforcements, for instance. And should you find yourself outgunned on the ground, a well-placed tear gas drop can give your infantry the edge.

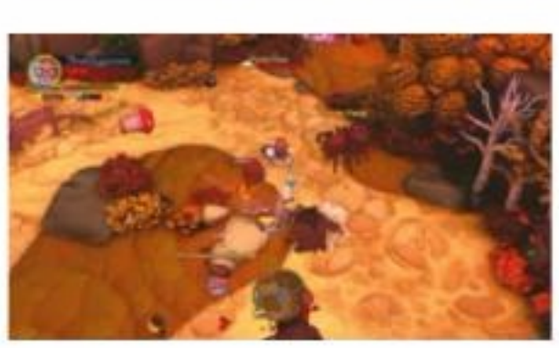
It's a pacier take on the template than many, with base building in particular moving along at a pleasingly brisk clip. Once you've saved enough dosh for a turret or sniper tower, you simply select it, hand over your dough, and plonk it down, with nary a timer in sight.

But Valkyrie has to make its money somewhere, so in place of pesky timers there's a tedious grind. XP and currency are doled out at a miserly rate, meaning the drip feed of new content can't stave off the creeping feeling of drudgery. A lovably chunky art style may lend a certain jolliness, but ultimately, it's a bit too lightweight and rather too tight-fisted to really satisfy in the long run. ■

65%

James Nouch

Hammer square for a bit, hammer triangle for a while, upgrade a weapon. Repeat.
Princess Muffintop
I am Princess Muffintop from the ruined lands of Titania, new lands of Great Bitten. We are here to speak with the Wise Old Fruit.



Format PS4 **Pub** Sony **Dev** Fun Bits Interactive **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

FAT PRINCESS ADVENTURES

Sorry spin-off that really takes the cake

Do you remember Gangnam Style? Remember that funny dance Psy did? Well, if the very memory of a three-year-old viral video has you guffawing with delight, then hoo boy, do we have a videogame recommendation for you.

Because while this may look like a simplistic hack-and-slash RPG, it doubles rather capably as a weary procession of dated references and confused quips. Its joke-telling philosophy seems to be that a reference is as good as a gag, apparently hoping that players will mistake the sensation of recollection and recognition for a quantum of comedy.

So, while the writers at Valve had the sense to avoid any explicit 'the cake is a lie' references in Portal 2, Fat Princess Adventures shows no such restraint, artlessly cribbing the eight-year-old line wholesale on multiple occasions. The cavalcade of stale allusions doesn't end there, though, and they have a certain down-with-the-kids desperation that's both offputting and quietly tragic.

But even if the jokes were all grade-A goofs, they'd still be part of a tedious game. Enemy encounters have all the depth and excitement of a puddle in Hull, with no unlockable skills or abilities to break up the endless flow of cannon fodder baddies. The only progression is a drip-feed of gear, which you can argue over with up to four players, should you wish. And while the streamlined RTS mechanics of the original game at least made it a distinctive proposition, this genre-swapped sequel can barely manage bland mechanical competence.

Too simple for grownups, yet full of 'humour' unsuitable for kids, this franchise resurrection finds itself stuck in a saccharine no man's land. ■

39%

James Nouch

HOT DOWNLOADS

The latest DLC and expansions explored

Techland's oft-delayed expansion to Dying Light will finally shamble out of the shadows this month, offering new locales, narrative intrigue, and the introduction of driveable vehicles to tool around Harran's outlying outbacks in. As such, The Following takes place on a wide-open map that's larger than the entire Dying Light base game, providing plenty of space for you to mow down rural walkers in your customisable dirt buggy. If all that revs your engine, the expansion is available on 9 February.

But if the promise of lurid sunshine and overgrown greenery has you pining for a more domestic brand of destruction, perhaps it's time to return to Rainbow Six Siege. Operation Black Ice will breach and clear its way onto Ubisoft's servers on 2 February, introducing two new operators, a spiffy new map, and a grabbag of weapon skins. It's all free to season pass holders, of course, while Joe and Joanna Normal will receive the map gratis but will need to fork out Renown to add the new characters to their roster.

Iron-sights enthusiasts will also want to look in on Call of Duty: Black Ops III this month, which is about to receive its first supply drop of multiplayer maps. The Awakening DLC pack features four new maps, including the return of Black Ops II favourite Hijacked and a stage that's set amidst the garish, twisty pipes of an abandoned water park. There's also the first chapter of a new Zombies narrative, Der Eisendrache, which is sure to deliver the usual blend of wave-based shooting and 100 per cent exacting attention to historical detail. Xbox One players take note, however,that it's all exclusive to PS4 players for a month.

But if the promise of dope no-scopes awakens no joy in you, there's always Pillars Of Eternity to consider. Obsidian's fantasy RPG has already received one expansion – The White March Part I – and the developer has promised to deliver a conclusion to this DLC narrative on 16 February. As well as that sweet story closure, though, there's also a nice lil' bump to the level cap and a new barbarian companion.

And that's your lot. Pillars may be eternal, but sadly this roundup is not.

ENTER ANSWERS HERE
http://bit.ly/gmretro
WIN A LIFETIME SUBSCRIPTION TO GM!

THE GRAND RETROMASTER CHALLENGE

A gaming gauntlet two decades in the making

Okay, so you know Black Flag and Black Ops like the back of your battered hand, you're a fiend at FIFA Ultimate Team and there'll be no jumbling up of Far Cry and Just Cause on your watch. But how far back does this expertise stretch? Back to when GM first settled on your nearest newsie's shelf? For this special issue, we've turned the RetroMaster tables to let you demonstrate how well you know the classics of generations past. Plus a few non-classics for the sake of balance. So let's be having you, fearless readers! Gird your loins and square up to our grand RetroMaster challenge! How close can you get to the max score of 300 points?

PART 01 Heroes
Questions worth 3 points

Easy start! Can you identify each of these cunningly disguised heroes from their trademark headgear?

Q4 Which Nintendo hero HASN'T appeared in a portable pinball spin-off: Mario, Samus, Link, Kirby, or Pikachu?

Q5 Fill in the next name in the sequence: Harry Mason, James Sunderland, and...

Q6 What advantage did Rinoa (Final Fantasy VIII), Jack (Dead To Rights) and Galford (Samurai Shodown) all share in a scrap?

PART 02 Villains
Questions worth 3 points

Can you name each of these six classic videogame villains from their suitably malicious quotes?

Q7 "Get lost, you can't compare with my powers."

Q8 "Fifty of me and this town would be ok. I took the trash out! I did! And I'd do it all again..."

Q9 "Still uttering the same nonsense. No matter. Now is the time to put aside your weak human side and join me in remaking this world!"

Q10 "By my gangrenous gut, I don't know how you escaped my Carnival Of The Damned, but you won't escape the taste of my blade!"

Q11 "You travel within the glory of my memories, insect."

Q12 "Someday... When this seal is broken... That is when I will exterminate your descendants!!"

PART 03 Gameworlds
Questions worth 4 points

Q13 Which of these is the odd one out: Shifting Sand Land, Dark Dark Dungeon, Hazy Maze Cave, or Tick Tock Clock?

Q14 What came after Karbonis but before Korodera?

Q15 Who visited Misty Island, Spider Cave, and Sentinel Beach in their very first adventure?

We'll tell you the name of the series, you tell us the name of the home planet pictured:

Star Fox

Beyond Good & Evil

Gears Of War

PART 04 Series
Questions worth 4 points

Q19 Which word connected Force, Wisdom, Soul, and Tears?

Q20 In which year did EA Sports score its first ever FIFA game on the Mega Drive?

Q21 Which of these series didn't have a DS instalment using the 'DS' acronym: Golden Sun, Guilty Gear, Ninja Gaiden, Resident Evil, or Advance Wars?

Can you name each of these series from the icon featured in its logo?

Q22

Q23

Q24

PART 05 Licenses
Questions worth 5 points

Can you identify each of these sci-fi movie tie-ins from a single screenshot?

Q25

SNES, Mega Drive - 1995

Q26

PC - 1997

Q27

PC, Xbox, PS2 - 2002

Q28 Bill Clinton, Prince Charles, the Beastie Boys, and the Fresh Prince were all hidden players in which sports series?

Q29 Which Batman game was allowed to introduce its own brand new titular villain, created by artist Jim Lee?

Q30 Michael Jackson showed up as himself in Space Channel 5: Part 2 and which other punchy Dreamcast sequel?

PART 06 Oddities
Questions worth 5 points

Q31 Shake shake! Marina was the robot heroine of which typically eccentric Treasure title?

Q32 Which ultraviolent blaster gave you a choice of playable characters including Cap'n Hands, Mamma, and Fwank?

Q33 James Pond 2: Codename RoboCod was famously sponsored by Penguin biscuits, but which fellow 16-bit platformer was chock-full of Chupa Chups?

From our synopses, and the number of letters in the title, can you name these games?

Q34 Weird people turn into weirder animal-people and beat each other senseless. Title sounds a bit sweary. (6, 4)

Q35 Shoot everything from piranhas to lava rocks to protect two diminutive, moustachieod doctors from harm. (5, 5)

Q36 Thoroughly implausible hero suits up to fight an evil queen, a mad professor, and a goldfish. Groovy. (9, 3)

RetroMaster

We ❤ Old Games!

PART 07 High scorers

Questions worth 6 points

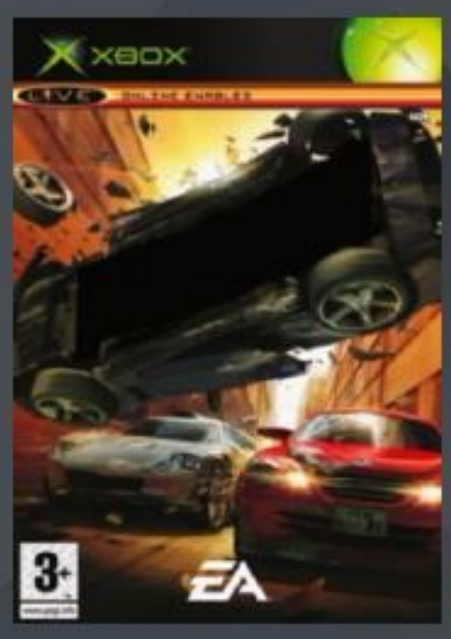
With the titles cunningly removed, can you still name these games that earned a score of 90 per cent or more in GM?

Q37

1993
PC, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga

Q38

2002
GameCube, Xbox, PS2



Q39

2005
GameCube, Xbox, PS2

Q40 "It sounds simple enough, but it'll be the best £25 you'll ever spend." GM's glowing review in late 1999 marked the arrival of which monstrous handheld series?

Q41 Which of these classic platformer buddies is the odd one out: Rambi, Winky, Poochy, or Squawks?

Q42 Which 97%-rated Capcom barnstormer contained the following exchange? "I've sent my right hand to dispose of you" "Your right hand comes off?"

PART 08 Underachievers

Questions worth 6 points

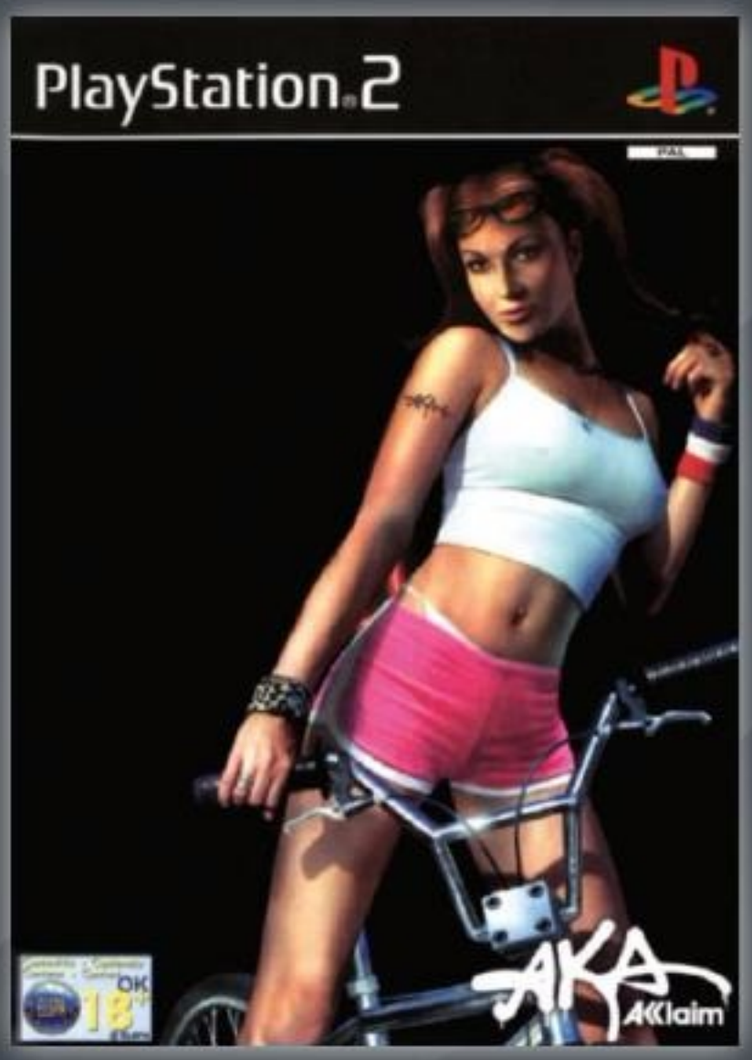
More trimmed-off titles! Can you name and shame these games that weren't exactly the subject of widespread acclaim?

Q43

2005
DS

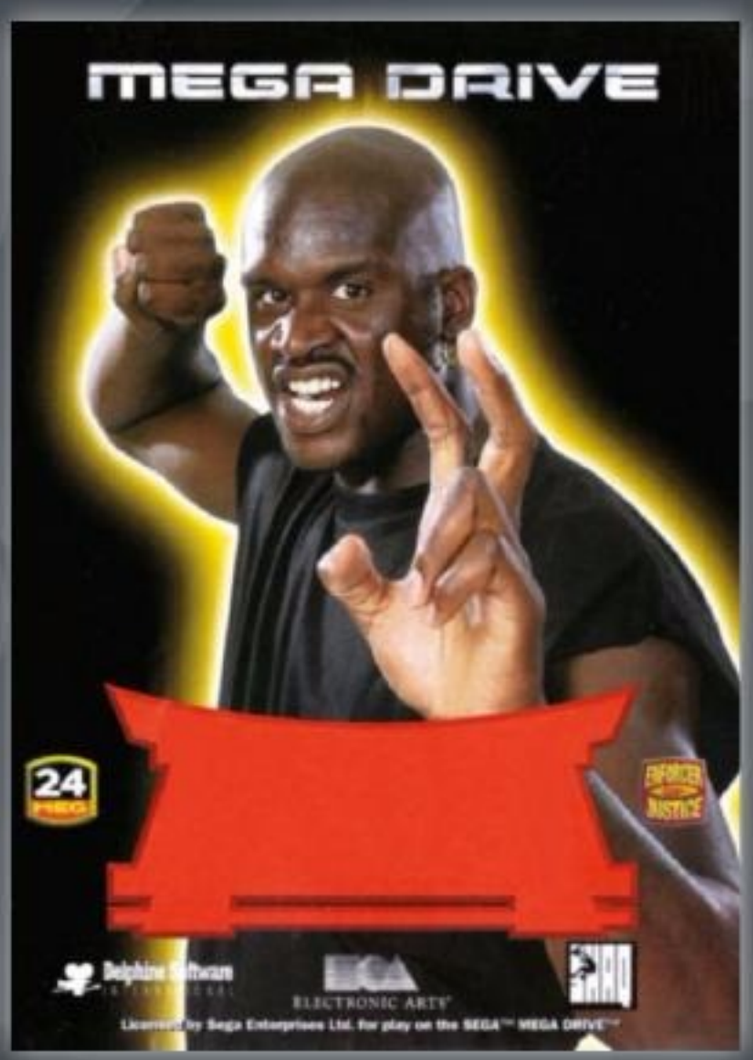
Q44

2002
GameCube, Xbox, PS2



Q45

1994
SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Game Gear, Amiga



Q46 "A pitiful mess... there's nothing even approaching a game in here... it makes us cry just looking at it." GM rated this notorious N64 exclusive 10% back in 1999. What was it?

Q47 Unscramble the anagram to find a legendarily crummy 3D platformer from the early days of the Wii: JADE INN BARMAN

Q48 Which of these original Xbox launch titles left GM least impressed: Fuzion Frenzy, Mad Dash Racing or Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions?

PART 09 Boss Battles
Questions worth 6 points

Q49 Hierophant, Magician, Emperor, and Fool were all bosses in which shooter series?

Q50 Metroid Prime 2. Ape Escape. Super Mario Sunshine. Rayman. The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time. Which one of these games *didn't* feature a face-off against a dark doppelganger?

Q51 What slightly unfair ability did bosses Zog (Breath Of Fire), Maleficent (Kingdom Hearts), and Marco (Tomb Raider II) all share?

Can you name these three particular games in much-loved RPG series from their final bosses?

Q52

Q53

Q54

PART 10 Classic GM
Questions worth 8 points

Can you unscramble the anagrams to identify three games reviewed in GamesMaster issue 1 (January 1993) on the formats listed?

Q55 TREE KIDS REST
(SNES)

Q56 ICONIC HAMMERS
(NES)

Q57 SPAIN INFLATABLES
(AMIGA)

And finally, can you name each of these games pictured on GamesMaster covers whose titles have been artfully concealed by sticky notes?

Q58 **Q59** **Q60**

1993 1996 1996

Fancy yourself a true RetroMaster? Head over to our online quiz page at **http://bit.ly/gmretro** and submit your answers to be in with a chance of winning a lifetime subscription to GamesMaster! That's right – get the highest points total (tie breaks decided by us!) and we'll send you a fresh new issue of GM every month for free for the rest of your days. Just submit your answers with your details before 3 March 2016 to be in with a chance!

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Freyu has done multiple Fallout shoots with Vault Cats Nak and Fawkes, and hasn't been Deathclawed yet.

ONCE MORE WITH FELINE

Dogmeat? Pah. Meet Catmeat. We pawse for thought with Cat Cosplay's **Freyu** to find out his secrets to dressing up puss in suits

The official Cat Cosplay tips include starting small – something like this stylish Assassin hood..

Dogs have been getting more than their fair share of attention in games lately. D-Dog, Dogmeat, and this issue we've got IndieMaster's number one slot taken by canine sim Home Free. Let's even things up a bit. We caught up with Freyu, the 'feline gaming wear professional' responsible for Tumblr's Cat Cosplay, to find out why he doesn't get turned into a human version of exceptionally fine pasta when he puts a Pip-Boy on his pet's paws.

Based in Seattle, Washington, Cat Cosplay's Tumblr has been running just seven months, but the team has been at work a lot longer than that. "Cat costuming for us has been going for five years. It started when we took our tortoiseshell out for a few street fairs as a shoulder cat – she rides on my shoulders in public," explains Freyu.

"Since she enjoyed getting out we started taking her everywhere. Going to a Renaissance Faire that year I bought a small dog Jack Sparrow costume for her so we could all go dressed up. The response was overwhelming from people wanting photos with her. So much so I became unhappy with the costume and by the next weekend we returned with a handmade dragon outfit with poseable wings and over 300 metal scales hand stitched on (that match her fur...). Cat Cosplay was born from this, and the desire I have to create. Building human cosplay can take hundreds to thousands of dollars. Here I can make the costumes for a fraction of that cost – and people enjoy them so much more."

And while most cosplayers have to stick to one costume over months, pet cosplay means outfits are much smaller and Freyu can work much faster. Fallout, Assassin's Creed, Batman, and Pokémon are only a handful of the game series that have inspired his costumes recently. But who is the talent? Do they ask for only Cravendale milk in their dressing rooms? "Nak is our tortoiseshell calico. She is a real sweetheart. She's great with the public and very good communicating with me when she needs breaks and downtime," Freyu says. "Fawkes, adopted on Guy Fawkes Day and he has the little goatee, is our tuxedo cat. He's about four now. When we adopted him we thought he would be a magnificent shoulder cat based on his kitten antics. But he never developed the balance for it and he's terrified of everything outside of our house. He's far too much of a scaredy cat to be a performer outside. But inside he has quite the swagger and gift for photoshoots."

Catwalk fashion

Looking at the shoots themselves, we'd swear there was sorcery at work as the cats happily pose in the complex costumes. Does Freyu put something, well, dreamy in their Dreamies? Apparently it's all about positive reinforcement, and the cats now even wait at the set if it looks like he's building a shoot. "Ask anyone who's worked with animals and its touch and go. Actors can wait hours to have an animal ready to shoot a scene for a TV show or movie," he says. "I have the cats trained to

"FOR EVERY PIC YOU SEE, THERE'S ABOUT FIVE TO 20 THAT I'VE DELETED"

Anyone for Thunder Ale? Nak enjoys a game of Hearthstone as much as the next cat.

Yes, that is indeed Emily Kaldwin from the upcoming Dishonored 2. She looks... furrier than we remember.

Fawkes takes his Ganondorf cosplay exceptionally seriously. Freyu spends a long time getting the lighting just right for each shoot, to make sure he captures his whiskered subject perfectly.

noise and treats to get them to look certain directions after I pose them. But more often than not they'll hear an external noise and move. For every pic you see there's about five to 20 that I've deleted."

Animal magic

While all of his projects impress, the Legend Of Zelda costume was Freyu's biggest work to date. "Ganondorf was the most challenging because I was learning foam as I did it," he explains. "I taught myself several new crafting techniques, and made a ton of mistakes along the journey. It took more than 40 hours to finish."

Freyu has tips for you if you fancy dressing up your feline friends. "Start small," he warns. "Make an Assassin's Creed hood that's just draped around their shoulders like a collar, or a an armor torque collar. Or a Batman cape. There's three big rules: Easy on, easy off – you have to be able to take it off within a split second. Velcro etc. It's important for your pet's safety. Know your pet's sensitive areas – every cat has places they don't like having petted or an area that's sensitive (whiskers, top of the head). The costume needs to be either loose around these areas or avoid them if you want your pet to wear it."

"Finally, make it a positive thing. If you put the costume on have a toy ready, or their favorite treat at hand," he continues. "All too often you see animals forced into a costume and just photographed. They aren't having fun. Why would they want to do it again? You have to know what your pet likes. Costuming is a thing that we humans enjoy, so it's figuring out a compromise with your pet where you both have fun."

Freyu makes whatever cosplay comes to mind, but does take requests, so if your moggy just isn't playing ball, you can suggest a suit on Tumblr. All the fun and none of claw marks? Purrfect. ■ ***Louise Blain***

SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS!

Watch this!

Mainline all the feline cosplay you could ever need and learn some tips for your own attempts at Cat Cosplay's Tumblr here: http://bit.ly/gmcatcosplay

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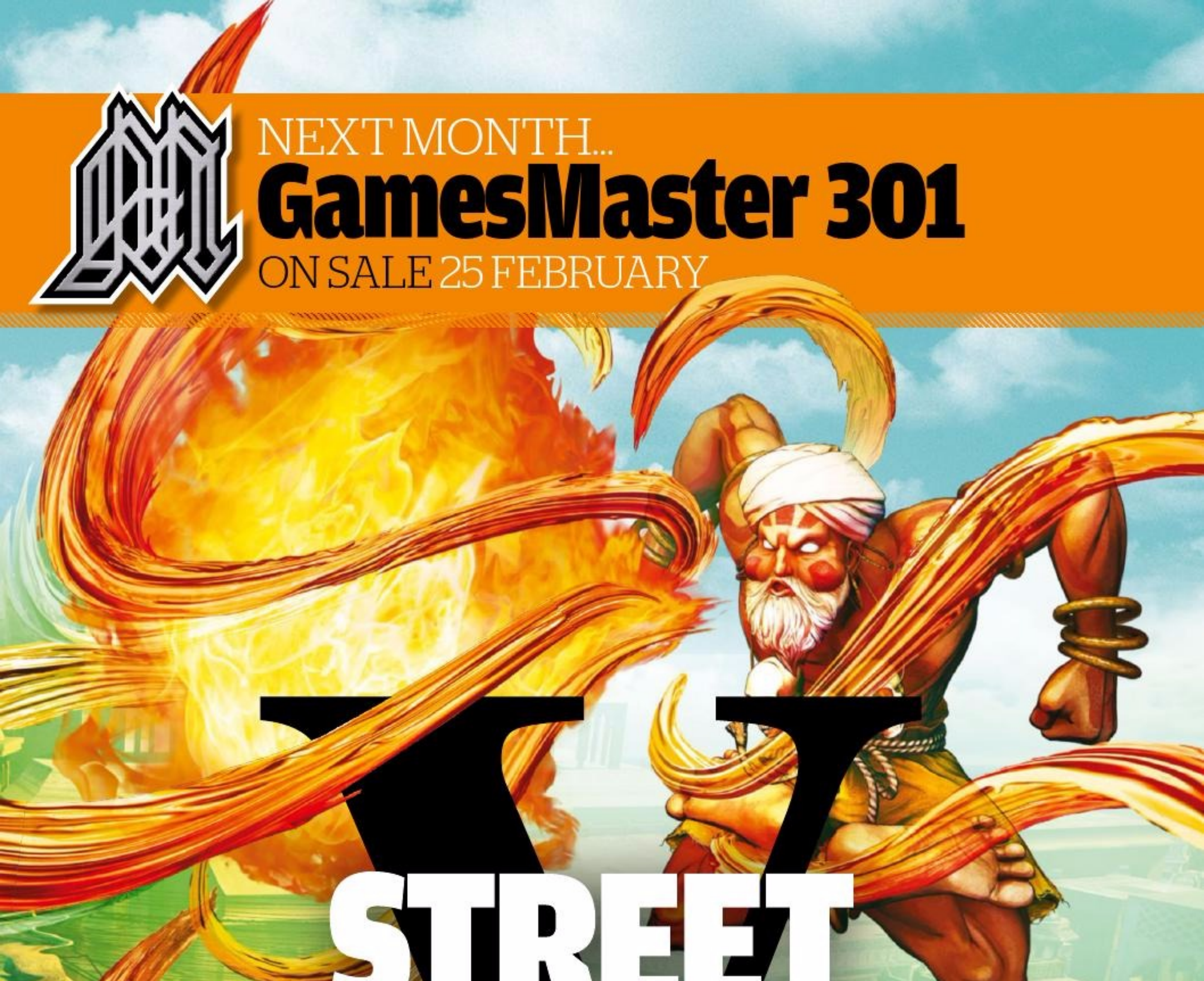

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